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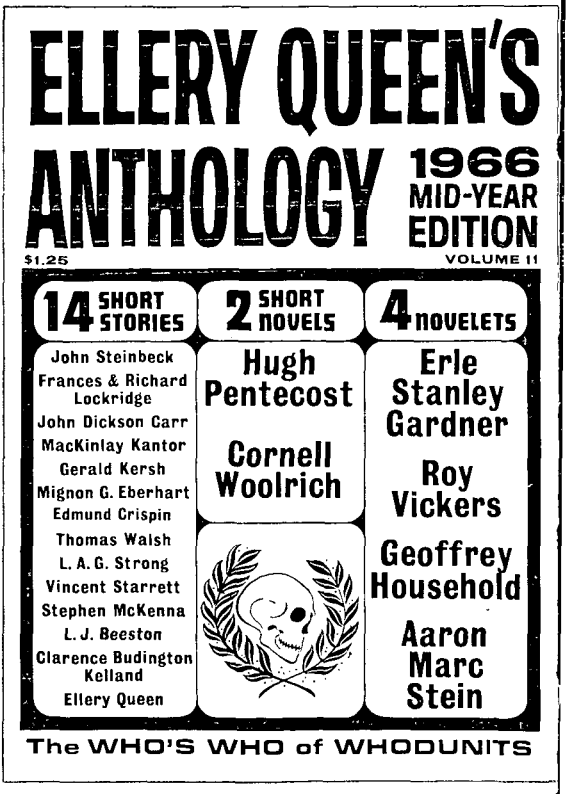

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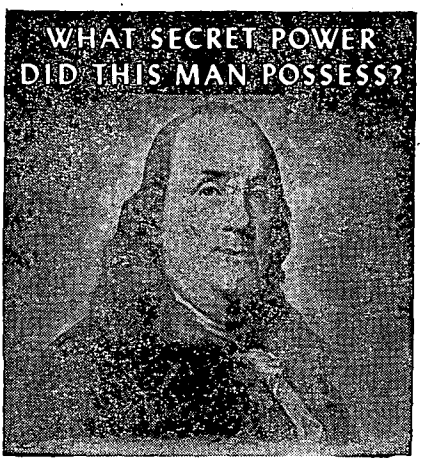

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NEWEST story of crime and detection by

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IT ONLY TAKES A MINUTE TO DIE

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

WHY HE WANTED TO KILL HIM need not be brought within the compass of this story. It would drag it too far back—through too many long, brooding, rancorous, and sick-minded years for it to be cohesive. And a story must have a concise starting point, otherwise it becomes just a formless loose-leafed casebook. All that need be said is that he wanted to kill him, he did kill him, and he botched it—and now let the story begin.

Names are not too important—they are only labels used to differentiate people. It is the action stemming from given characteristics within a given situation that counts more as identification, that brings forward the individual personality. And since one played the part of the killer, and one the part of the dead, let them be known as Killare and Dade. That will characterize them beyond all doubt. The killer and the dead.

As he stood there waiting for the bus he'd missed that night, Killare

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wasn't even thinking of this man he'd dedicated himself to kill. It was one of the few times, night or day, that he wasn't. A skin-teasing, mosquito-like rain was needling him, and it felt more like icy pollen than rainwater. His collar was turned up, his hat brim down, he was chilled and getting more chilled by the minute. His shoes were starting to squirt instead of scrape when he scuffed them.

The bus must have broken down along the way, and had to be taken off the run and towed back to the garage. Which meant there would only be one more coming along after that—the buslines closed down for the night at 1:00 A.M. and didn't start rolling again until 5:00 in the morning and the last bus wouldn't get to his stop until about 1:15 or even later.

He turned and looked around despairingly for some kind of shelter to tide him over during the wait he foresaw coming up. He was standing out in front of a corner residential hotel. He'd noticed it when he first halted at the bus stop, but hadn't given it a second thought since.

Now as he looked again he caught sight of a small, neat neon sign with the word *Bar* on it posted above a separate doorway to one side of the main entrance. Also he noticed that the doorway was flanked by a number of lighted windows that looked out on the very stretch of sidewalk he was standing on.

He decided to do his waiting in there, and warm up while he was about it—that is, if he could find some place to sit that would let him keep an eye on the bus-stop zone outside. He walked over and went inside. It was a happy little place, warm and restfully lighted and sprightly—not raucous, but with the sound of soft-spoken voices. And his luck was working—the end seat at the bar, the one nearest the windows, was vacant. Probably because all the rest were taken up by couples, and this happened to be an odd seat, one left over.

He sat down on it, ordered a short but stiff bourbon, and as he slowly started to glow back to welcome warmth again, he kept his head turned watching the sidewalk outside the window, which the rain kept covering with a patina of little disappearing pinpricks all the time, no two of which ever landed in the same spot twice. They looked like a swarm of drowning bees.

Finally, to ease the strain on his neck muscles, he turned around and glanced the other way, down the line of people extending along the bar. Man and girl, girl and man, two men, man and girl. Just then, at the opposite end of the barline, a man stood up to leave. This brought his head and shoulders up two or three feet higher than those of everyone else. If it hadn't been for that, the man would probably never have attracted Killare's attention or been given a second look, among all those

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people and in that subdued light.

But standing head and shoulders above everyone else like that, he caught Killare's eye. Killare focused it on him, Killare gave him a double-take, Killare recognized him.

And it was he, Dade, the man it had become his daydream and nightmare to kill.

If he had any doubts about it, the barman clinched it for him. "Good night, Mr. Dade," he said in a voice clearly audible above the confidential conversations going on all around. "Stop by and see us again sometime."

Dade nodded, said a word or two to the man in the next seat, then turned and went out. Not through the street door by which Killare had come in, but through a door at the opposite side of the bar—a door which led inside to the hotel lobby.

So he had a room right here in the hotel, Killare thought, noticing that Dade didn't have a hat or coat with him. And now that an extraordinary coincidence had dropped Dade right in his lap, he wasn't going to brush him off like an ash or a stray crumb; he was going to take advantage of it.

Killare put a dollar down on the bar top, got up, and went in the same direction Dade had gone. He didn't hurry or try to overtake him; he went at the same casual pace Dade had moved.

He turned right outside the door as he had seen him do.

He found himself in an intimate little side corridor, groomed with crystal prisms and white-leather banquettes. It opened onto the main lobby, and he stopped there and hung back a moment. The desk was a little offside, not in a direct line, and Dade was standing in front of it.

He heard him say, "Can I have the key to Room 212, please."

The clerk said, "Good night, Mr. Dade," as he handed it to him.

Killare turned and doubled back out of sight. Not all the way, for he might not have been able to make it in time without Dade getting a glimpse of him. But everything seemed to be working out just right for him, to unroll as smoothly as in a dream. A dream about murder.

There was a pay telephone booth to one side of him, and all he had to do was edge into that and sit down on the little slab-seat. It obviously had a light to go with it—a light that usually went on automatically; but even this was on his side. The electric bulb was burned out.

There were a few moments' wait. Then Killare heard the elevator panel slur open, click closed, and Dade had gone up.

Killare came out of his cranny and went over to the desk.

"I just missed the last bus," he mourned as the clerk looked up.

This was literally true, but the clerk misconstrued it, just as Killare had wanted him to, and thought he meant an out-of-town or commutation bus. "Would you like a room?"

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he offered. "We'd be glad to have you with us."

"You've saved my life," Killare smiled. ("And cost somebody else his," he refrained from adding.) "I like a low floor, as low as I can get. How about the second?"

"I'm sure we can fix you up with something."

"Do you have a line of Number 13 rooms in this hotel?" Killare asked craftily.

"No, we're superstitious. We skipped over them," the clerk smiled.

"All right, how about 214 then?"

The clerk checked his file. "Sorry, Room 214 is occupied."

"Well, 211 then?"

"I can give you that," the clerk nodded, after checking a second time.

Killare thought: I haven't given him a chance to realize yet how I've been fishing for one particular location; in a minute or two, after I've gone up, it'll start to sink in, what I did just now. So I'd better take the sting out of it by beating him to it, and explaining it myself. Better my own harmless explanation, freely given before it happens, than his own dangerous inference, put on it after it has happened.

"I met an old acquaintance I haven't seen for years, in the bar just now. Mr. Dade. We've planned getting together over breakfast in the morning—that's why I asked for a room near him, on the same floor."

"How long will you be with us, just the one night?" the clerk asked as Killare signed in.

"How long is Dade staying?"

"Until the day after tomorrow."

"Then I may as well stay over a second night myself, now that I'm here," Killare told him. "I've got some important business to attend to."

He needed the next day to get the gun. He'd decided long ago it should be a gun, and only a gun. A gun was tidy, swift, and usually successful. Knives were messy, and impact weapons like crowbars and wrenches and bludgeons—they got matted with gore and hair; and besides, they could be warded off by a sudden twist or turn of the body. A gun, now, that was a man's weapon, and this was a man's killing.

He'd paved the way for the gun long ago; he knew where to get it, whom to get it from, and how much it was going to cost him to get it. But he hadn't wanted to get it until he was ready to use it; it was an illegal gun, it had to be, and to carry it around on him for any length of time beforehand was too risky—it would be asking for trouble in the worst way. Even to keep it hidden somewhere on his own premises was no longer safe. The police now had this new break-in-and-search procedure, which didn't stand back to wait for warrants, and you could never tell when they were going to spring it on you. Violence that had become almost an everyday commonplace in the city had in turn

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brought about police methods that were often not strictly out of the lecture room or official handbook.

So the gun was his for the asking and paying—he'd already seen it and handled it; but he needed the extra day to get it. He hadn't had the faintest idea he was going to meet Dade that night, and in this unlooked-for way.

"Take this gentleman up to Room 211," the deskman instructed a bellboy.

The door to Dade's room was squarely, point-blank opposite his own, he saw when he got up there. And the separation wasn't the width of the main corridor, but of a side corridor. He could step from his door to Dade's without putting down the same foot twice.

Lingering behind a moment while the bellboy fiddled around the room, he imagined he could even hear Dade's breathing coming through the opposite door, with the cloying heaviness of approaching sleep.

Sleep tight, he wished him grimly. It's your last night on earth for doing so. Tomorrow night this time you'll be sleeping in a different way—cold and doughy and smelling of formaldehyde.

The bellboy went out, and Killare picked up the phone without a minute's waste of time, almost before the door had latched back into place, and asked for a number It was in the Yellow Pages, but you wouldn't have found it if you'd looked under "Guns."

There was an unusually long wait, as though the telephone was ringing in the back of somewhere. The back room of somewhere. Then even after the connection opened up, there was nothing—no voice, no one said anything. As though the person standing by it was very cagey, very wary about answering his calls, didn't even like to commit himself to a noncommittal "Hello" until he had some idea who was calling.

Finally, to break the deadlock, Killare said, "How about it? You there?"

"Whosis?" came back a guarded voice—so guarded it was barely allowed to pass through the speaker's lips.

"Remember me? I was in there a couple of times about—something."

"I don't remember you," the voice said peremptorily. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I am—" Killare started to elaborate.

The voice cut him off almost hysterically. "Look, no names! There could be woodpeckers somewhere along the line. Tap, tap, tap—you know? Everybody has them nowadays," he went on. "Even housewives."

"This has nothing to do with your regular business. It's something we discussed on the side."

"Oh," the voice said, enlightened. "Now I know." The voice sounded

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almost relieved, as though bargaining over the sale of an illegal gun was a mere nothing, a bagatelle, compared to the man's main-line occupational hazards.

"You know that package?" Killare said. "That package you're holding for me? I'm coming around to pick it up. I have to have it tomorrow. I'm coming around tomorrow about five."

The voice was still determined to play it safe. "A lot of people leave packages in my care that I don't know anything about. It's like I was running a parcel service. Sometimes they never show up again, sometimes they show up a year later and expect me to remember." Which would be his "out" if the gun were ever to be traced back to him; Killare got that. "You could come around here tomorrow at five, like you say, and I still wouldn't know you from Adam." Which was an oblique way of saying, All right, come ahead around at five; and Killare understood that too.

"Even if you brought four hundred dollars with you, I still wouldn't know you." And he understood that too.

Killare gave an unmirthful laugh. "Price has gone up, I see."

"When you want a thing bad it always goes up."

"I want it bad," Killare said to himself.

He was well satisfied as he hung up. The man on the other end made him smile, with his melodramatic antics, his stage waits on picking up the phone, his cryptic conversations, and the rest of his cover-up gymnastics—all of which were as out of date in today's hard-shelled, gear-stripped world as a man's opera cape or a mushroom-shaped helmet on a cop. The police themselves would have been the first to laugh at him. The man probably had read too many dime novels when he was a boy, or else he had an ineradicable sense of guilt about not having stayed honest, which expressed itself in this form. But he was reliable. He delivered the goods—when you laid cash on the line.

Nothing to do now but raise the money and wait. And strangely enough, he enjoyed the waiting too. It made him feel twice as good. It added a spice to the enterprise. It was like doing it over twice, once in contemplation and once in commission.

He stretched out across the threadbare sofa in one long, straight, unbroken line from the top of his head to the backs of his heels, and made a cushion of his clasped hands and placed them at the back of his head for a head-rest. A little table-top radio beside him, which he had flicked on, warmed up and cut in with almost bull's-eye patness on a deep-throated woman growling a blues: *"There's gonna be some shooting like there never was befoa, And the undertaker-man is gonna knock upon his doa—"*

"Sing it, lady, sing it," he urged.

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It may feel bad at first when you're wronged or damaged or trampled on in some way there's no forgiving, but it feels good later to kill the man you hate for doing it to you. It sure feels good, he exulted.

It feels like a drink on the house.

It feels like a Cadillac all your own.

It feels like when the dice come up with your point, and the floor is papered with other people's money.

It feels like when a beautiful blonde runs her fingers through your hair, and then throws away her shoes because she says she's never going to walk away from there again.

It feels even better than all those things put together.

When he returned to the hotel at eleven the next night, he had the gun.

Dade wasn't back in his room yet—he could tell because he glimpsed the key still sticking out in the mail box adjoining his, when he stopped at the desk to pick up his own. Not that this was an infallible guarantee; most hotels kept spares in their mail boxes, in case a guest locked himself out and had left the key inside the room.

He preferred it this way—Dade not yet in. It could give him time to get things warmed up inside of him.

He went into his own room, closed the door, and made the few, very minor preparations there were indicated—and they were far less complicated and taxing than those required on many less crucial occasions, he reflected.

First, he adjusted his door so that it could open at one clean sweep, without the interrupting hitch of freeing the latch by turning the knob, and without the accompanying warning sound this would give. In other words, the door was left open a narrow crack—but this couldn't be detected unless it was peered at closely from either side.

Next, he took the telephone directory, which each room was supplied with, from under the nightstand and stood it up on end against the wall just inside the door, in readiness for its particular use. To make it even more suitable to the purpose he had in mind for it, the hotel had encased each directory in its own stiff binding, with the name of the hotel and the room number stamped at the top. The binding made the directory rigid and unbendable.

Finally, he checked the gun—but this was purely a fidget reflex, not a necessity, for it had been turned over to him in perfect readiness.

After that he spent the time walking aimlessly around the room—not wanting to sit down, for some unfathomable reason—touching various objects at random as he passed them, without even knowing he was doing so. Now the edge of the dresser, now the corner of the bed, now the back of a chair. Once he

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turned off a lamp as he went by it, then immediately turned it on again in the course of the same stride. A number of times he tightened and loosened his necktie, and once he lifted his foot to the arm of a chair, and undid, then retied the shoelace. All for some unknown reason.

The behavior pattern of a particular man passing the time while waiting to commit a murder.

The one thing he did not do was the one thing he might have been expected to do the most—smoke. Perhaps he did not want to be caught with one in his hand, if Dade unexpectedly showed up, and not know what to do with it, where to put it. Even infinitesimal things like that can throw a timetable off balance.

His excitement was very great—it would be a lie to say it wasn't; but equally it was under very great control. Besides, it wasn't an unwelcome excitement: it was a buoyant, uplifting one. It was a heady feeling, like the kind champagne gives. It was the feeling an actor has just as he's about to go onstage; a prizefighter when he's about to step into the ring; a racing-car driver when he's about to open up the throttle; a parachutist when he's about to dive out the hatch. It was Exhilaration—the benzedrine of the psyche.

A little short of 1:00 A.M. he heard the sound of a cab driving up at the street entrance, and wondered if it was Dade; but he didn't go to the window to look. If it was, then he'd find it out when Dade got up here, and if it wasn't it wasn't.

But it was. After a couple of minutes' interval he heard the scuff of a step come up to the door across from his own. He widened the crack in his door just enough to frame one eye in it, and saw Dade standing there with his back to him, putting his key to his door. He wasn't staggeringly, ballbearing-kneed drunk, but he'd had a couple—you could tell that by the formless little tune that was simmering under his breath, and if nothing else that meant his reflexes would be slower by that much.

Everything was on Killare's side. Everything, everything. There never was such a stacked murder before.

The act of entering a room by opening up a closed door ordinarily entails three separate stances or directional pivots, although it is such an habitual act, performed so many times a day, that no one ever gives it that much thought. First, you face the door and open it. Second, you enter and turn around to face the direction in which the door is going to close. Third, you close it back to where you found it. It is simple, but it does have these three moves to it, which are usually run together as if they were one continuous motion.

Killare caught him neatly between the first and the second positions, right where the split was, right where the joint was. Dade had

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the door open, he was in through it, and he was just turning. Killare's door sluiced open without a hindering latch-break, and Killare aimed his telephone directory at the opening across the way and slid the thick book full force along the floor. It went in just right, dead center, in the groove, and jammed there.

Before Dade had time to react by more than just a bugged look downward, trying to understand what the inexplicable obstacle was to closing his door, Killare had straddled the directory with a scissoring spread of his legs and was inside Dade's room with him.

He did the two things now that Dade hadn't had the coordination to do for himself in time: he kicked the slablike directory back out of the way into a corner of Dade's room, and he closed Dade's door. But from the *inside*—which made all the difference in the world. The gun had come out, somewhere during the course of his in-leap, and immediately took charge of Dade's numbed reflexes.

"Now don't open your mouth to make any noise," he said with taut tonelessness, "because I'll let this go at you."

"And don't move your hands anywhere near me," he added. "Keep them by you where they belong."

Dade didn't open his mouth; he seemed unable to.

Killare went on talking, as if he found it a necessity to. "Those're the only two things you've got to remember, and then everything'll be all right," he cautioned him. Which was a false promise, but then there was no future beyond the next minute for one of them, and a promise by its very nature lies in the future.

"And don't be nervous about it," he warned him. "Because if you are, then you'll get me nervous too. And if I get nervous, then I won't be able to control myself. Just take it easy—that's the best thing for both of us."

Dade, through lips that were as loose as a rubber band—and almost about the same color—finally managed to quaver, "What is this? Is it money you're after?"

"No questions," Killare said curtly. "No conversation. I'm not going to tell you that a second time." And he lifted his thumb away from the gun, as if it were itching him, then allowed it to fall back again.

"Where's the bathroom?" he asked him.

Dade nudged toward it with his head, afraid now to talk any more.

"Go in there and put on the light."

Dade did.

"Now turn on the water full force—both taps, the hot and the cold. The tub, not the shower."

He wanted this to deaden the dialogue. And to diminish the shot—when it came. Water running down inside a shower stall makes only a hissing sound. Water tumbling into the resonant hollow of a tub makes

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a deep booming sound. It pounded like walloping drumbeats.

He had to pantomime him outside again by head motion, since the rushing water drowned out their voices at that distance.

Even outside in the room Killare had to step closer to him than before, in order to speak and be heard, but he kept the gun beyond the orbit of any hand-swinging snatch, and that was what counted.

In stories and in television pictures men are continuously charging against guns and their holders, and overthrowing both; but in real life it doesn't work that way. The only kind of man who would charge a pointed gun is not a brave man, but a fool.

"Now start getting undressed for bed, just like you would any other night. Put your things where you always put them."

Dade discarded his outer clothes, seeming to have twenty fingers that got in each other's way. He stood there holding the garments up like a jittering clothes-tree.

"Where do you put your coat and pants ordinarily, on other nights?" Killare demanded impatiently. He had to lean toward Dade's ear a little to ask it, so that, ludicrously, it made it seem as if the information imparted was secret.

"I put the coat on a hanger in the closet, and I attach the pants by their cuffs to that pants holder on the inside of the door."

"Well, do it, then. Don't stand looking at me."

After Dade had swung open the closet door, Killare kicked a chair over against it to hold it pinned back, so that Dade couldn't suddenly shut himself into the closet away from the gun.

"Don't you take things out of your pockets?" he said sarcastically. "I do."

Dade dumped out a pocket keycase with a snapdown cover, a wallet, a fistful of loose change, a ballpoint pen, a warped package of cigarettes, a clean handkerchief, an unclean handkerchief, and two books of matches, all onto the dresser top. One rebellious quarter rolled off and landed on the floor.

"Let it lie there," Killare instructed. "Looks more natural."

"Now what do you do with your shirt?" he prodded, like a headmaster in some boy's prep school trying to teach personal neatness. Only in this case the penalty wasn't a demerit; it was death.

"I put on a fresh one every morning, so I just throw the used one across a chair."

"Just throw it across a chair, then. And your necktie?"

"I change according to the shirt. So I just spread it out on the dresser, until I'm ready to take out another."

"Spread it out on the dresser, then. Now get into your pajamas."

Dade turned a little to one side, self-conscious about stripping in front of a stranger.

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"Now go over to the desk there. Sit down and put on the desk light . . .

"Now take out a sheet of notepaper, an envelope, and a pen . . .

"What's your wife's first name?"

Dade shuddered uncontrollably; you could only see it from the back, the way he was sitting.

"Patricia," he whispered, as though he were all out of breath.

"Turn around. I can't hear you on account of the water."

Dade turned and said it again. He looked as if the thought of her was making him feel ready to cry.

"What do you call her around the house?"

"Pat."

"Then write this: 'Dear Pat—'"

Dade wrote, Killare back of his shoulder reading as he wrote.

"'It's no use, I can't go on—' How long you been married?"

"Fifteen years." He said it with what sounded like a sob, but with the water pounding in the bathroom you couldn't tell; it might have been a wet-hiccough sound.

"'—after fifteen years. To have you tell me you're in love with someone else and want to leave me is more than I can take.'"

Dade flashed him a white look over one shoulder, then turned back again, as the gun suggested with an almost imperceptible lift.

"'I'm going to let you have your freedom, Pat, but not the way you think. This way.'"

Killare arched his back to scan what had been written.

"Make your handwriting shake a little more," he criticized. "It looks too steady."

"I don't know how, on purpose," Dade said with a haggard face.

"Try it. This ought to help you do it." Killare twisted the bore of the gun, like an awl, flush against the nape of Dade's cringing neck. The next specimen of handwriting came out spidery and agitated.

"'I love you. Goodbye.' . . .

"Now sign your first name . . .

"Now fold it over and put it in the envelope . . .

"Now seal the flap . . .

"Now write on the outside: 'Kindly deliver to my wife.' . . .

"What's that on your finger, a wedding ring? Take it off and put in on the envelope."

Dade had a hard time with it. "It hasn't been off in fifteen years," he said wistfully.

"Spit on it," Killare ordered.

It came off with a jerk.

"Now have you got a snapshot of her in your wallet? Go over and get it."

Dade tried to show it to him on the way back, as if hoping it would soften him. Killare didn't look at it.

"Put that on top of the note too . . .

"All right, that'll do it. Now come over here and sit down on the edge of the bed. No, don't turn the covers down, you're not going to get into it."

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Dade was unmanageably crying by now. His eyes were bright, and a shiny puddle had gathered in each corner without spilling over. The sight of the ring and the snapshot had probably hit him in his weakest spot.

"Die like a man," Killare said scathingly. "Not like a sniffling schoolboy. It only takes a minute to die. What's so big about it?

"Now swing your legs up onto the bed. That's it. Take off the top one of those two pillows, and hand it over to me."

Killare took it from him and shoved it under his own arm, temporarily.

"Now lie back on the other one. Put your head back on it and look straight up. No, don't do that!" he warned suddenly.

Dade's control began to shred. "I can't take any more," he moaned. "You do it too slow. Hurry, if you're going to, only hurry. I can't hold out any more."

A scream of hysteria was trying to form and escape from him, far too late and far too useless. His mouth rounded into a noiseless O. He put one hand over it, fingers spread out like spokes. Then he put the other hand over that, fingers also spread. It looked as if he was kissing some kind of a squirming baby octopus. Or munching it.

"Look straight up," was the next to last thing Killare said to him. "See that spot on the ceiling? That one there? Keep watching it."

He let his whole body fall forward on top of him, using the pillow as a buffer between them, obliterating Dade's face under it. Pressing it down hard at both sides. Then quickly releasing one side, but only to force the gun under the pillow, and fire into the middle of Dade's face.

Dade's legs quirked up, in motor-reflex response, fell back again, and that was all. He never made another move.

When Killare took the pillow off, which he did at once, he could tell Dade was dead. But so newly so, so just-now so, that the last breath was just coming out of his widened mouth, with no more behind to follow it. And his eyes were just dimming closed, to spring open again and stay that way forever.

The hole had gone right between the eyes. It was a beautiful shot, considering that it had been fired blind.

He pulled Dade's head up a little, using the collar ends of his pajama jacket as a halter to raise it by, in order not to have to touch the head itself, which he was squeamish about doing, and inserted the second pillow underneath again.

He did things to the gun the importance of which he was personally contemptuous of and which he felt to be greatly overrated; but for the sake of prudence he decided he might just as well be doubly sure: namely, he cleaned off both sides by scouring the gun diligently up and down one trouser leg, then held it

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thereafter with a scrap of tinfoil extracted from a package of cigarettes.

He tried to hook Dade's index finger around the trigger guard and let the gun hang that way. One of Dade's arms was dangling loose over the side of the bed. But the finger was not yet rigid as in rigor mortis, not yet resilient as in life; it was simply inert, and the gun kept sliding off and falling down.

He finally lifted the whole arm up over the body, and attached the gun there, and the body itself held it in place.

There was very little else to be done. He noticed a slab-shaped pint bottle of whiskey, nearly full and probably left over from the night before; he poured a little into a tumbler and stood it beside the bed close to Dade's head. Then he poured the rest up and down the bed and body, in flicking, criss-cross diagonals, giving Dade a last fling, so to speak. Or a requiem.

Then he let the bottle fall down empty, wherever it happened to fall —but not until he had made certain that none of his own fingerprints were on the glass or the bottle.

Then he went in and with a handkerchief wrapped round his hand, turned off the two apoplectic bathtaps. The stopper hadn't been set, so there was no danger of an overflow, but the continuing uproar might have finally attracted attention outside in the hall and brought about an investigation.

Then he went out and closed the door firmly after him.

And it was all over, just as easy as that.

All done with.

Finished.

He drew a vast sigh of unutterable, boundless release. He'd never felt so good before, never in his whole life. They told you that people were frightened after doing a thing like this, scared sick, that they sweated, panicked, didn't know which way to turn. Well, either they didn't know what they were talking about, or these were a different kind of people—weak, unsure; or perhaps they hadn't hated hard enough, as much as he had.

The others—the weak ones—shouldn't have done it in the first place. They weren't meant for murder—except on the receiving end. Because now all he felt was a supreme sense of well-being, placidity, repose; the calm after the storm. The way you feel when you come off the massage table in a Turkish bath, with every muscle encased in velvet and every nerve resting on rose petals.

Six long years of pent-up hate had been swept away, all in the space of a single minute ("It only takes a minute to die," he'd said), and now he was shiny-new again, whole again, his own man again, free to lead his own life again.

He stood there by the window, his hands expansively in his pockets, teetering buoyantly on the balls

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of his feet, up and then down again, up and down. He stood there by the window, but he wasn't looking out; he was looking inward, at himself, and he was content with what he saw. Love can't hold a candle to murder, when it comes to emotional intensity and satisfaction. Not little fly-by-night, potshot murders in the course of a holdup, no; but a murder like this, like his, the goal of six years of hoping, planning, waiting, seething, living with it, almost dying with it.

He could have checked out then and there; there was nothing to keep him in the hotel any longer. But he thought, why mar an otherwise perfect accomplishment by a single false note, when it isn't necessary? To check out at two in the morning from a room directly opposite the one in which a man will be found murdered is bound to be remembered afterward. But to check out at nine in the morning, perhaps after an innocent-looking attempt to call the dead man's room to suggest they have breakfast together—that would be a master stroke of tactics, of bravado.

He couldn't have been expected to hear the shot; other rooms nearby were occupied, the clerk had said, and the people in those rooms obviously hadn't heard it. And there was no way in which he could be placed in the murder room—no way at all.

Yes, the clever thing to do was stay on, normally, naturally. And it took no courage to do it, as he found when he proceeded to do so. He unslung his necktie, without taking it off; even, presently, asked for bar service and ordered a double bourbon sent up to the room.

He was amazed, after he'd finished it, to find himself actually nodding, dozing off, in the chair in which he was sitting. He picked himself up, went over to the bed, and lay down on it, without taking off his clothes, only his shoes.

He wouldn't have believed it was going to happen, but the next thing he knew he opened his eyes and it was past nine in the morning. There was an unusual amount of subdued coming and going immediately outside his door, even for a bustling little hotel, and he saw that he'd slept for six hours, deeply, dreamlessly.

He wondered if anyone had ever done that, in the whole history of the world, after doing what he'd done the night before.

After he had showered and shaved—the hotel provided its male guests with little complimentary shaving kits, in case they were caught without their own, as he had been—he stuck his head out the door and took a quick, inquiring look. No harm in that, anyone would have, with the amount of traffic going on in and out the opposite door. At that particular moment the door across the corridor happened to be closed, but there was a conspicuous *Do Not Disturb*

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sign dangling from its knob. It was still jittering from its last swing back and forth. There was a low sound of voices going on in the room.

He shut himself in again, hesitated briefly, then picked up the phone and said casually, "Room 212, please."

The girl was patently disconcerted by it. She gave a noticeable breath-catch, said, "One moment, please," and then went offside, apparently to ask instructions about what to do.

When she came back again she said, "I'm sorry, I can't reach Room 212 just now."

You bet you can't, he thought grimly.

"Do you care to leave a message?"

"No, nothing important," he said indifferently, and hung up. It would have involved leaving his name, and that would have been going a little too far. But the indifference in his voice wasn't put on; it was a genuine indifference—he really felt that way.

He decided to soak in, luxuriate in the sensation of complete immunity he had—to enjoy it, to play it up for all it was worth.

So he went to the phone and ordered breakfast sent up to his room. A big breakfast, with all the trimmings. It was a time to celebrate, to indulge himself.

It arrived remarkably quick, in less than ten minutes, but when he opened the door in answer to the knock, instead of breakfast he got two detectives.

They announced what they were, then came on in without waiting to be asked.

They began questioning almost before the door had closed behind them.

"Did you hear any sounds in the room opposite you—212—at any time during the night?"

"Not a thing. I slept like a log," he said. Which was the truth.

"Mind if I use your phone?" one of them then said.

"Go right ahead." But he wondered why they hadn't used the one in the murder room, which was just a few steps away.

"What's that number again, Barney?" one of them now asked the other.

His partner answered, "You're a very absent-minded guy, Jack. Can't even keep a telephone number in your head."

Killare somehow received the impression that the conversation was completely insincere and meant only for his benefit.

"I'll look it up," the first one said. "Got a directory in here?" he asked Killare.

"Sure, help yourself."

"Where is it?"

Killare saw the hole opening under his feet.

But there was nothing he could do.

He went tumbling in headlong, beyond all escape and all recovery.

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The book wasn't in here. It was in there.

"You better come along with us," was the next remark. No more questioning, no more fooling around. All business now—deadly business.

"We checked every room on this floor. Every room but two has one directory in it. Standard equipment. *One* room has *two* in it. Where he died. One has *none*. This one."

They took a half-turn twist in his coat sleeve, one on each side of him.

"That doesn't place me in there," he said stubbornly. "How do you know it belongs in here? It might have come from somewhere else."

"Each directory is in a special hotel-binding. With the hotel's name stamped on the top of it. And the number of the room it belongs in. The second one in there has 211 at the top big as life."

One of them closed the door after the three of them with his free hand.

The *Do Not Disturb* sign on the opposite door seemed to mock Killare as he went past it. It even quivered a little with the draft from their passing—the way a person shakes a little when he's laughing to himself.

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. . . especially if you watch BATMAN

The town of Spannersburg (pop. 3572 or 3577) prided itself on the biggest police force in the state—he weighed 327 pounds. But the town had good reason to be proud: its one-man police force, Pardee Phillips, was a shrewd investigator—and even more important, he had an open mind. How else could he have solved the fantastic case of a comic book hero actually coming to life and subduing two bank robbers merely by touching them with his "electric" hands? . . . An appealing and heart-warming detective story . . .

MR. LIGHTNING

by JAMES KNOX

MR. LIGHTNING HAS THE PERfect physique, broad-shouldered and narrow-hipped, of the professional strongman and the boyish smile of every adolescent girl's dreams. His costume, worn whenever he pursues evil-doers, consists of the briefest of skin-tight red shorts, a white T-shirt with a red lightning flash streaking across the chest, and a white cape. On his feet are ankle-high boots, and a red mask covers his eyes. He subdues criminals simply by touching them with his hands, each of which can deliver a charge of electricity "sufficient to stun but not kill."

Mr. Lightning appears exclusively in a monthly publication called *Mr. Lightning Comics Magazine*. But on one occasion, to the consternation of a small-town cop and a county detective, an eyewitness saw him step from the pages of the magazine into real life . . .

The Spannersburg branch of the Luffwell Valley Trust Company was successfully held up by two men at 8:50 A.M., ten minutes before it was due to open. By the time the bank *did* open (on time, as usual) everyone in town, with the exception of babes in arms, had developed a theory concerning who had done it and the best way of catching them.

Spannersburg—population either 3572 or 3577, depending on the position you took concerning a disputed boundary to the south of town—hadn't had so much excitement since the Volunteer Fire Department had once unknowingly dragged a burning brand from a small brush fire under their truck and into the firehouse, starting a

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blaze that had gutted the building.

On receiving the first report of the robbery, the local telephone operator, a Mrs. Lois Corrison, rang up all the party lines in search of Pardee Phillips. She gave the few available facts and a good bit of conjecture to everyone in town who owned a phone and finally located Pardee at The Ol' Swimmin' Hole.

The Ol' Swimmin' Hole, Spannersburg's single attempt to provide recreational facilities, was actually a cement-lined pool at the edge of town, near the watertank. It was open to anyone in Spannersburg who had 25¢ admission and it provided not only the pool itself but two locker rooms and a full-time lifeguard, a college boy named Frankie Latimer, who was lured to Spannersburg during the summer not so much by the peon's wages he received as by the adoring stares of the local teen-age feminine set.

Pardee Phillips, Spannersburg's only policeman, wallowed happily at the shallow end of the pool. He liked to lie in the water, especially at times like this, before the pool was officially open for the day, and let his tremendous weight be supported by the cool green liquid. The citizens of Spannersburg had long made a joke of Pardee's personal appearance. "Yessir, we got the biggest police force in the state—he weighs 327 pounds."

Nevertheless, most of the town's young men could recall that when they were in a jam because of a "borrowed" car or a little too much of the cup that cheers on Saturday night, Pardee had been able to say a few words in the right places. Oh, he'd roughed them up a bit with those huge hands of his; but most cases were kept out of the courts, and Pardee had the satisfaction of knowing that for most of the boys in town one mistake was enough.

Frankie Latimer, just coming on duty, answered the ringing phone on the outside wall of the locker room and turned to Pardee.

"Hey, Pardee, it's a guy named Vance at the Luffwell Trust. Says something about thieves and robbers—at least, that's what I think he said. He was screaming pretty loud into the phone."

"Okay, tell him I'm coming, will you, kid." Frankie made a face. He didn't like to be called a kid. He was proud of the muscles he'd developed playing football at college, and it was getting to the point where he needed to shave every day.

Pardee hauled himself out of the pool and sloshed to the locker room. "Oh, boy," he muttered to himself. "Somebody probably let a dime roll under the table and the books don't balance. Who'd rob a bank in a hick town like this?"

When Pardee arrived at the bank it was jammed with citizens pumping the bank employees for information while ostensibly making a

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deposit or withdrawal—usually the latter.

"How much'd they get, Miz Dallman? Musta been a couple of hundred thousand anyway." (Ike Foswell, mortician and florist.)

"I bet you was scared when you seen all them guns, huh, George?" (Rufus Tenny, junk dealer.)

"Sorry, Rufe, we can't say anything till the police come. We'll tell the story to Pardee." (George Vance, bank president—still a bit white around the gills, but obviously enjoying all the attention he was getting.)

"Why, they were the biggest pistols I ever saw! The little one pointed his right at me. I was so scared, I like to die." (Lillian Dallman, one of the bank's two tellers.)

"They had that criminal look about 'em. They were desperate men—you could see it in their faces." (Alfred Galt, the other teller.)

Pardee questioned the witnesses, trying to find some area in which all the stories—or even *two* of the stories—agreed. Sorting through a mass of misinformation, error, and downright lying, he finally got a rough idea of what had happened.

The men had entered the bank by simply walking through the front door which Mrs. Dallman had unlocked at 8:30. Nothing suspicious there—Lillian always unlocked that door at 8:30, knowing that nobody except bank employees was allowed to enter until the village clock tolled nine. The two men had worn dark business suits, but their faces had been covered by bandanna handkerchiefs and baseball hats pulled low so that only their eyes were visible.

They may have had guns. Their pockets bulged, but nobody had had enough nerve to find out what the bulges represented. They bound and gagged the four bank employees and dumped the contents of Alfred Galt's cash drawer into a burlap bag. Lillian Dallman had not yet taken her cash drawer from the vault.

The two men had said nothing; a note had given the necessary commands. They made no attempt to enter the vault but left through the rear door leading to the alley which ran the length of the block behind the bank and the stores on either side of it. At 9:00 the first customers to enter the bank had released the four bound people. Finis.

Plodding stolidly to the rear of the bank, Pardee considered the door through which the men had left. He called back over his shoulder to the bank president. "George, you better call the detective bureau over at the county seat and have 'em send over somebody. By the way, you got any idea how much is missing?"

George Vance said that although the exact amount couldn't be determined for at least a week, he could state confidently that between $330 and $340 had been taken.

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Pardee opened the sheet-metal fire door and stepped into the alley. The men had been pretty smart, all right. Less than an hour ago they had gone through that same door, probably whipping off their handkerchief-masks and caps at the same time. The chances were excellent that nobody was in the alley. Anyway, thought Pardee, they probably had a lookout in a car, just to make sure. He gazed around idly, on the off chance that they might have dropped a cap, a bandanna, or some other physical evidence. No such luck.

"Hi, Mr. Phillips!" Pardee looked up from the ground to see who had called. He noticed a slight movement on the back porch of the house directly across the alley from the bank. The porch was covered with morning glory vine, leaving it in shadows, but Pardee recognized the voice.

"Hi, Billy," he called back, and walked over to the porch and up the steps. Billy Fraze sat far back in the shadows, a huge stack of comic books on the table beside him. Another batch, even larger, lay strewn beneath one arm of the wheel chair which had been Billy's prison during the entire seven years of his life.

Pardee glanced quickly from the table to the floor. How long does it take a kid to look at that many comics? An hour? Maybe longer?

"Gee, Mr. Phillips, have I got something exciting to tell you. You'll never guess what happened a while ago."

Easy now, thought Pardee. Maybe, just *maybe,* I got me an eyewitness. Just go slow and don't scare the boy.

"Well, it all started when these two guys came out of the bank through the back door over there."

Bingo!

"Billy." Pardee was trying to be very quiet and patient. "Billy, were they wearing anything over their faces?"

"Yeah, but they took 'em off as soon as they got outside. But wait till I tell you what happened then!"

"Billy," said Pardee sharply, "those men were bad. I've got to find those two men, Billy. I've got to arrest—to capture them."

A smile lit up Billy's face. "But, Mr. Phillips, he already captured them."

He? Pardee wondered if someone in town had suddenly developed the gumption to make a citizen's arrest. "Billy, who captured them?"

In one twisted hand Billy held up a battered comic book. On its cover was a masked figure dressed in an outlandish red and white costume, its arms spread wide and an artist's representation of electric sparks darting from each finger. Billy looked at it proudly as he gave his answer.

"Mr. Lightning."

"Mr. *Who?*"

"The man in the comic strip. He

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walked right up the alley there just when the men came out of the bank, and touched them with his electric hands. And then he took them back down the alley."

Pardee tried to imagine the comic book hero moving through the back alleys of Spannersburg. He chuckled slightly.

"Billy, do you know what pretending is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know that sometimes we have to be serious and tell the truth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, just tell me the truth, Billy. Only what really happened. Okay?"

"Okay, Mr. Phillips."

"Now, Billy, what did the two men who came out of the bank look like?"

"Gee, I don't know, Mr. Phillips. I was too busy watching Mr. Lightning."

"So that's what we've got to work with, Mr. Kress. No physical evidence. And the only one who saw 'em without their masks is Billy Fraze. But all he can talk about is Mr. Lightning."

Matt Kress, the detective from the county seat, sat on the edge of the pool and watched Pardee. Kress, a young man, had a shock of straw-colored hair and almost no chin at all. He looked more like a slightly dull farm boy than a detective, but Pardee's amusement had turned to respect three days before when he had watched Kress examine the scene of the crime for ten minutes and then sum up everything it had taken Pardee ten hours to learn.

At the far end of the pool Frankie Latimer was scotch-taping a pink sheet of paper with the new pool rules to a homemade bulletin board hanging on the lifeguard's tower. "I think we can discount Billy's story," Kress said with a grin. "Somehow, I can't figure a comic book hero catching those hoods. If it got to be a trend, it might put both of us out of jobs."

"Yeah, I guess you're right, Mr. Kress. It's funny he keeps sticking to that story, though. The other kids coming through the alley really give him a hard time. Every time one of 'em goes by, he screams, 'Mr. Lightning,' and then starts laughing at Billy. And poor Billy just has to sit there and take it."

"Does he ever say he wants to change his story?"

"No. I think he really believes it. About all he does every day is sit there with those comic books. Probably when the men came out he was half asleep. Got what he saw mixed up with his dreams."

"I'd like to know what he'd been eating to give him dreams like that. If you ask me, I think you're wasting your time with him."

"Right now, Mr. Kress, that boy's all we've got to go on. I keep hop-

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ing he'll remember something he hasn't told us yet."

"Okay, but I'd hate to be the District Attorney, depending on that kid's word for a conviction."

Pardee stood in the pool and called to Frankie. "Hey, kid, we're leaving now. Time for the rest of the town to get wet and cool off."

"Some day," Frankie said, "you're going to swim in here once too often before I come on duty and drown. There you'll be, with your backside resting on the bottom and nothing but your belly above the surface."

Pardee laughed as he and Kress went through the chain-link gate of the pool and got into the car. "Frankie's getting more spunky. I razz him a lot, but that's the first time he's razzed me back."

In town Pardee dropped Matt off at his boarding house and proceeded to the Fraze home. As he drove the car into the alley he could hear shouting in different youthful voices.

"Mr. Lightning! Zoomeroo!"

"I'm gonna get all you robbers with my electric hands!"

"Hey, ol' Billy Fraze. Read any good comic books lately?"

"Mr. Lightning coming to your house for dinner, Billy?"

Pardee came up quietly behind the nearest boy, grabbed him around the waist with one huge arm, and lifted him off the ground. He then returned the boy, just as gently, to earth, saying, "Now git!" The alley cleared itself of juvenile humanity in almost miraculous fashion, leaving Pardee and Billy alone.

As Pardee walked up the steps and onto the porch, Mrs. Shirley Fraze, Billy's mother, creaked open the screen door leading from the house and slumped into a folding chair. She had a hurt, angry expression on her face, and her eyes were red, as if she were going to cry or had just finished.

"Morning, Mrs. Fraze," said Pardee. He gazed at the sun, just appearing over the bank building. "Going to be a hot one, today is."

"I suppose you want to talk to Billy again. Is that why you came?"

"Mrs. Fraze, the last time I was here you made it pretty plain that you'd rather I'd leave Billy alone. I wish I could. I know you've had a rough time, with Billy's needing your help all the while. But I've got a job to do."

"I've got a job to do, too, Mr. Phillips. Just a moment, please." She rose, wheeled Billy inside the house, and returned to her chair on the porch. "I've spent the last seven years trying to show Billy that his being in a wheel chair doesn't mean he's so different from anyone else. I've taught him here at home so he can do schoolwork as well as anyone his age. Lately he's even had a few boys over to the house to play with him. That may not seem like much to you, Mr. Phillips, but it's a major victory for him. Now

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you keep dropping in here asking him about those men at the bank and telling him, oh, so sweetly, that he's been seeing things with this Mr. Lightning business. Well, some of those kids you just drove off were Billy's playmates only a few days ago. I won't let this happen to him, Mr. Phillips. I have a duty as his mother."

"Yes, ma'am, you do." Pardee's voice was low and gentle. "And I have a duty, too. I have a duty to this whole town. And talking to Billy is the only way I can see to do my duty."

"But you've talked to Billy, Mr. Phillips—that's all you and that Mr. Kress have done since the robbery."

"Please, Mrs. Fraze, put yourself in my place. I just can't accept Billy's story at face value."

Shirley Fraze's eyes were cold as she turned her head to stare at Pardee. In the stern tone of an attorney questioning a reluctant witness, she replied, "Why not, Mr. Phillips?"

Pardee shook his head as if he couldn't believe what he had just heard. Even allowing for the love of a mother for a crippled child, this was going too far. But Shirley Fraze pressed her attack.

"I said, Mr. Phillips, why not?"

Pardee's face got red, and he raised his fist to pound it against a pillar of the porch. But he paused, took a deep breath, then sat down on the top step. When he spoke, his voice was low and full of fatigue and three days of frustration.

"Mrs. Fraze, do you really believe that this Mr. Lightning got out of a comic book, came up the alley, and captured those two men?"

"No, that's not exactly what I believe, Mr. Phillips."

"Then what—"

"Remember that Billy has been trained from the time he could talk to tell me the truth. I don't say that all his observations are one hundred per cent correct. But he was wide-awake when the two men left the bank—I'm sure of that. I further believe that he did see Mr. Lightning take the two robbers away with him."

Pardee was stunned. First Billy, and now his mother.

In a clipped, logical tone Shirley Fraze continued. "If we assume for a moment that Billy told the truth as he saw it, Mr. Phillips, how does your case shape up? Why couldn't it be a man *dressed as a comic book hero*? A man looking like Mr. Lightning enters the alley here and catches two criminals. Perhaps 'catches' is a poor word—'meets' might be better. At any rate, he takes the men down the alley and out of Billy's sight. Now it becomes your job to find out why a man would dress himself in that outlandish costume, how he could subdue two men instantaneously, and what he did with them. That's your job, Mr. Phillips, not pestering a crippled boy."

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Shaking his head in disbelief, Pardee turned to face Mrs. Fraze. "That still doesn't give me much to go on, does it?"

"From what I can see, you've got a lot more to go on than you had before."

A man. Not a comic book hero but a man, an ordinary man. Why would he dress up in a costume that would make him the most noticeable thing around? It was a weird question, but it *was* something a cop could investigate.

Pardee spent the rest of the morning answering calls and making his daily round of the village's business section. After a meager lunch of a double helping of ham and eggs at McQuade's Diner, he returned to his office at the rear of the Post Office. Once there, he pulled down the shades, took a cigar from a desk drawer, lit it, and leaned back in his swivel chair with his feet up on the desk. He was now ready to think—undisturbed.

A man dressed like a comic book character. If Pardee were going to believe Billy Fraze, he would have to believe in that, too. Only things like that just didn't happen in real life, especially in a place like Spannersburg.

But suppose it *had* happened?

Well, in that case why didn't this public-spirited hero turn the men over to the police? The robbers couldn't have disappeared any more completely if they had planned this way to escape.

If they had planned this way to escape—

Pardee sat upright in the chair with a jolt that almost caused him to bite his cigar in two. He grabbed the phone, lifted the receiver, and impatiently jiggled the contact.

"Lois," said Pardee, "will you get me Mr. Kress? He's staying at Mrs. Megrum's place." He could hear her ring, and when Mrs. Megrum answered, he asked for Matt.

"Yeah, Pardee." Matt sounded as if he'd just been awakened from a nap.

"Come down to my office right away, will you, Matt? I think I've got something new on the bank robbery."

Ten minutes later Matt Kress entered Pardee's office. An additional two minutes served to give him the gist of Pardee's conversation with Shirley Fraze. Then Pardee lit another cigar, leaned back, and in a deliberately offhand manner said, "Matt, let's do a little supposing about two things we haven't thought of before."

"Shoot."

"Let's suppose that Billy Fraze *was* telling the truth. Only let's further suppose that the man, Mr. Lightning, was working with those hoods all the time."

Matt Kress shot up out of his chair and leaned on the desk, facing Pardee. "Now look!" he said. "If you got me down here just to spin me some cock-and-bull story about—"

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"That would explain the story we got from Billy, wouldn't it? It would also explain how those two were 'subdued' so quickly—no sense fighting a man who's a friend of yours. And maybe that's the reason nobody has seen hide nor hair of any of 'em since. That's three of our questions answered right there."

Matt Kress dropped back into his chair. He was fast developing a new respect for this small-town cop. In his mind floated visions of crime fighters in masks and cloaks flying through the halls of the detective bureau, but he did have to admit that what Pardee said made sense.

"Billy didn't see Mr. Lightning fly or anything, Matt," Pardee continued. "He just saw him walk up the alley. Could have been anybody dressed up that way."

"But why, Pardee? Why would anyone wear a get-up like that in the first place? And how come nobody else saw him in that costume?"

"I dunno, Matt. I'm going to turn it over in my mind a while. Meet me at The Ol' Swimmin' Hole early tomorrow, and we'll talk about it some more."

"Pardee, I don't think you'd miss your morning dip if everybody in town was kidnaped. I'll be there, but I think I'll pass up the swimming. It's too cold for me that early."

At seven thirty the following morning, before the pool was opened to the public, Matt Kress squatted on the edge near Pardee, who lay on his back in the shallow end, sprawled out regally and looking for all the world like a bull walrus. They continued their discussion of the previous day.

"I've got me an idea about Mr. Lightning, Matt," Pardee began. "You just listen, and when I'm finished you can have the privilege of ripping holes all through it—if you can."

"Go ahead, Sherlock," said Matt. "I've been in this town almost a week now, and I've been taking a ribbing from the boys at the bureau for not coming up with something. Last night when I phoned in, they told me it was costing the taxpayers more for the investigation than those guys got from the bank."

Pardee pressed his fat fingers together across his belly. "I've got it figured this way," he began. "There were three men in on the holdup, but the brains of the job was in a car at the end of the alley, serving as lookout. Being out there, he could signal his henchmen if anyone came through the alley before they went into the bank. And if anyone came to the alley afterwards, it was up to him to get that person out of the way before the robbers left.

"Now Mr. Brains can't see the front of the bank, but he probably has it planned so he knows just when the robbers will enter.

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They're planning a quick operation—in, scoop up what cash is on hand, and right back out again. Less than five minutes, all told.

"Anyway, the two men are in the bank when Mr. Brains looks up the alley. And who does he see being taken out for a little fresh air and sunshine but Billy Fraze in his wheel chair.

"Now look at the position Mr. Brains finds himself in. Nobody came in either end of the alley, but here is an A-One eyewitness right across from the back door of the bank, all ready to yell his head off when the two robbers come out through the rear door and take off their masks."

Matt Kress looked at Pardee thoughtfully. By this time he had become caught up in the story, and was imagining what he would do if faced with the same problem.

"He couldn't just go up and warn them," Matt said, "because then Billy would recognize him if he ever saw him again."

"So there's Mr. Brains in the car, and there's Billy right across from the bank," Pardee continued. "Mr. Brains does some real quick thinking and figures that if one of the heroes from Billy's comic books comes up the alley, Billy will only remember him and not be watching the robbers too closely. And who'll believe him if he does tell what he saw?

"So he puts on that Mr. Lightning get-up, walks up the alley as big as you please, grabs his two accomplices, and walks them off with their backs to Billy. And since Mr. Brains, in his costume, is wearing a mask, he doesn't have to worry about being recognized. A pretty good scheme, eh?"

"Hi, Pardee. Hello, Mr. Kress." Frankie Latimer, dressed in swimming trunks and carrying a small roll of Scotch tape and another pink paper announcement for the bulletin board, came out of one of the locker rooms.

"Hey, Frankie!" Pardee called. "Come on over here. I want to see if you and Matt agree on a theory of mine."

As Frankie walked the length of the pool, Matt leaned over and whispered to Pardee. "This idea of yours is all fine. But where did Mr. Brains get his costume? Don't try to tell me he had it all ready in the car just in case something like this came up."

Pardee chuckled. "You know, that threw me for a while, too. Then last night, sitting in my office, I spilled a cup of coffee all over the top of my desk. Every blasted paper I had there got soaked. And suddenly there was the whole answer, staring me right in the face."

By this time Frankie was standing next to Matt at the edge of the pool. In a playful manner Pardee flicked a few drops of water at Frankie, who ducked as the water hit him. "Hey, that's cold!" he shouted. "Besides, you'll get this

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bulletin all wet, and I only made one out." He held up the bulletin, and both Matt and Pardee, who was climbing out of the pool, could see that where the drops of water had hit the paper, the pink sheet had changed to a deep red.

"No, Matt," Pardee drawled. "I don't think Mr. Brains would have a rig like that all ready. But how would anybody fix up one on short notice?" Pardee slowly walked with Matt to a spot in front of the locker rooms, between the doors, and again faced the pool. He spoke more loudly.

"It would have to be somebody who had a white T-shirt right in the car. Well, a lot of people wear them. Only he'd have to have those tight red shorts, too. A pair of swimming trunks ought to do for that. Now what sort of person would just happen to have a pair of swimming trunks in the car with him that early in the morning?"

Frankie was now at one end of the pool, the bulletin crumpled in his fist, facing the two men. Pardee went on as if he hadn't noticed the change that had come over the boy.

"What about a white cape? Wouldn't a bath towel work fine? And who would be likely to have swimming trunks *and* a white towel *and* a pink bulletin in his car?"

Frankie Latimer lunged at Pardee, swinging one fist for a roundhouse punch. The fist splatted against Pardee's side just below the ribs with a sound like that made by a piece of meat being dropped on a hard wooden surface. Pardee's body didn't move an inch. He stared at the young lifeguard with infinite sadness.

Then he stepped forward and grasped the boy almost gently under the arm with one huge paw. He heaved once, and Frankie Latimer flew the five feet between Pardee and the pool. The splash as Frankie landed sent water flying in waves over the pool's edges.

"So that's about it, Mr. Vance." Pardee stood beside the chair in which the weeping Frankie Latimer sat, dressed once again like Mr. Lightning as Pardee had insisted while charges and explanations were being made. George Vance sat bolt upright behind his desk as befits the respectable banker. "Frankie had the things he needed for his costume right in his car. The mask and that red lightning bolt on his chest threw me for a while. But when I spilled that coffee last night, I saw how water can change the color of paper, and then I remembered those pink bulletins Frankie always had with him.

"He dipped one of those bulletins in the jar of milk he carries with his lunch and changed the color of the paper to deep red. Then he tore it into the jagged shapes he needed and scotch-taped 'em across his T-shirt."

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"What about the two accomplices?" asked Mr. Vance.

"Frankie gave me their names and where they live. They're college friends of his. We've already contacted their families, so you'll probably be getting your money back in a few days."

"And what happens to this young man?"

"Well, that depends. It's his first offense. Now, if I can get his cooperation on one thing, maybe I can persuade the court to go easy.

Frankie raised his head questioningly as Pardee paused. Outside the rear window of the bank shrill voices could be heard.

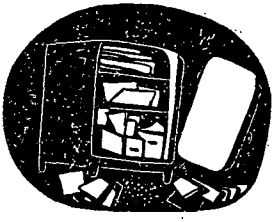
"Mis-ter Light-ning, ha-ha!"

Pardee motioned with his thumb toward the window. "If I could just talk Frankie into going over there in his costume and shaking Billy's hand, I think it would help Frankie a lot at his trial."

The pool attendant looked at Pardee for a full thirty seconds. Then he picked up the wet paper mask from the desk in front of him, walked to the rear door of the bank, and turned to face Pardee. "Thanks, Mr. Phillips," he said.

A few moments later, hearing the raucous jeering in the alley change to gasps of worshipful surprise, Pardee sighed, sat down, and faced the bank president.

"I guess no one in this town," Pardee said, "will ever disbelieve Billy Fraze again."



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You've read of murder committed by every conceivable (and perhaps inconceivable) weapon—but have you ever read of a modus operandi for homicide that turned on a toothpick?

THE TOOTHPICK MURDER

by JAMES HOLDING

AFTER HIS FIFTH SCOTCH, OLIVER could no longer resist a compulsive urge to talk about the murder.

This was understandable. The murder, as he had planned and executed it two weeks before, possessed certain overtones of irony that set it, in Oliver's opinion, apart from and above other murders. His murder, he flattered himself, had a cachet all its own—a flavor so subtle yet so heady that it could be fully appreciated only if shared with someone else. And to share the joke with the murderess herself, still sweetly ignorant of her own responsibility for the homicide—that was a temptation utterly irresistible.

He settled himself comfortably with another drink into his big leather chair in the library, across the fireplace from his wife, Margo. She said in a matter-of-fact voice, "Don't you think you've had about enough to drink, Oliver?"

"No, Margo," he answered reasonably. "As you are well aware, my tolerance for alcohol is extremely high." He snickered. "Much higher, I might add, than that of a certain Sidney Gant, deceased."

Margo dropped the newspaper she had been holding. "His death completely ruined my party," she said with mild indignation.

Oliver grinned. "Surely his death meant more to you than that. Do you deny that Sidney Gant was in love with you?"

"Of course I deny it! Sidney and I were companionable, nothing more. We had similar interests."

"He was in love with you, Margo. A blind man could see it."

"Perhaps being a woman and not blind," said Margo with admirable relevance, "I missed that obvious fact. In any event, I certainly wasn't in love with him."

"That may be true," Oliver said, taking another small sip of whiskey. "But you were quite flattered by the attentions of such a wealthy and successful fellow, weren't you?"

Margo looked pointedly at Oliver's whiskey glass. "What Sidney died of," she said stiffly, "was alcohol poisoning, if you remember."

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Oliver said, "He certainly had been lapping up the stuff at our party like a thirsty cat in a dairy. But I have news for you, darling. Sidney Gant didn't die of alcohol poisoning."

Margo's eyes were puzzled. "What on earth do you mean?"

"What Sidney died of," Oliver announced with a verbal flourish, "was too much interest in you." He couldn't help drawing it out a little. It increased the already bittersweet pleasure of confession.

She sniffed her disdain. "Me?"

He nodded. "You. Don't you understand, darling? Sidney Gant was *murdered* at your cocktail party."

She looked at her husband for a long moment before she decided he was actually serious.

"That is impossible," she then said soothingly, as any woman might who was trying to pacify an unreasonable husband. "Sidney collapsed in our dining room right there—" she pointed toward an archway—"while he was talking with several of our other guests in front of the buffet table. Not one of them even touched him. When the doctor got here, Sidney was dead. You know that as well as I do. The autopsy showed he had been drinking heavily, that's all. They said he died of alcohol poisoning."

"He was murdered," Oliver repeated.

She lost patience. "Who killed him then?" she asked sharply. "And how?"

Oliver said, "*You* killed him, Margo."

She felt a slight easing of the tension that had been building in her since Oliver had begun this crazy conversation. She knew she hadn't killed Sidney—of that she was positive.

"Yes, you," Oliver was saying. "You were the actual murderer. Although I claim major credit for it." He noted with relish the expression on his wife's face—a blend of distaste, dislike, and disbelief. He pretended to think she was expressing alarm. "But don't be frightened, dear," he said. "Sidney was killed in such a way that you will never be suspected. Nor will I."

"Will you please stop drinking and go to bed?" Margo said angrily. "You're out of your mind."

"Ah," said Oliver with the air of a man whose wife has just paid him a ringing tribute, "you didn't know what a clever man you married, did you, Margo? Shall I tell you how I managed to get rid of that rich idiot who liked you too much?"

She was silent, suddenly torn between the Scylla of curiosity and the Charybdis of doubt. He took her silence for assent.

"It was simply a matter of playing on his fastidiousness. The fool was always fanatically fastidious about his food, his dress, even his women."

"Thank you." Her sarcasm was monumental but it seemed to please

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Oliver. He laughed. There was a touch of alcoholic shrillness in the laugh.

"His murder was set in motion by a spot of cocktail sauce on his gray silk tie," he said.

Margo shrugged. "I saw the spot on Sidney's tie. In fact, I was the one who told him about it, knowing his distaste for any indication of personal carelessness."

"Exactly. You saw the spot. You told him about it. And what else did you do?"

"Only what any hostess would do for a worried guest with a spot on his necktie. I took him into the kitchen and got him some cleaning fluid and a clean rag to take the spot out."

Oliver nodded complacently. "I knew you would, dear. You are so thoughtful, such a good hostess—especially to so wealthy and admiring a guest. I knew I could count on your social instincts in this matter. That's why *I* put the spot on Sidney's tie."

"You put it there?"

"Of course. I was talking to him by the hors d'oeuvres. I ate a shrimp on a toothpick after dipping it generously in cocktail sauce; and after I had eaten the shrimp, I tapped Sidney's necktie with the toothpick to emphasize what I was saying to him. And thereby made a spot on his chic cravat." Oliver paused. "By putting that spot on his tie, I prepared him for death. Sounds melodramatic, doesn't it?"

"Quite." She spoke coolly but an edge of uneasiness had crept into her voice.

Oliver sat back farther in his chair and sucked on a piece of ice from his whiskey glass. Then, enunciating carefully so that she should miss none of his triumphant words, he said, "When you got Sidney that cleaning fluid and rubbed his necktie with it, Margo, you killed him."

She protested indignantly, "I didn't! All I did was get the fluid for him. I left him in the kitchen to clean off the spot himself. I returned to my other guests immediately. And Sidney was talking in the dining room, perfectly well, when he collapsed later. Quite a bit later."

"Of course. But the spot was gone from his tie, wasn't it? When he collapsed, I mean?"

"Y-e-s, it was. He had removed it in the kitchen, naturally."

"There you are," said Oliver. "He was very deep in his cups and had used the cleaning fluid on his necktie. *Requiescat in pace.*"

"What are you trying to say?"

"Do you remember the eminent doctor from the Western Clinic we met last year? He told me that the fumes of cleaning fluid—carbon tetrachloride—when combined with a too-generous ingestion of alcohol, can cause death. And that such a death is invariably attrib-

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uted, for lack of other evidence, to alcohol poisoning."

Oliver spread his hands in a broad gesture. "After all, Margo darling, Sidney used the cleaning fluid you obligingly found for him on a spot right under his nose—where he couldn't help inhaling the fumes for some time afterward, along with more of my Scotch."

Stunned, Margo regarded Oliver as she might have regarded a rattlesnake coiled in the chair.

Oliver managed a laugh. "So you see, Margo, I planned his death. But *you* killed him. Wasn't that clever of us both?"

Margo remained for a moment chained to her seat. Then she stood and went slowly to the library door. She disappeared through it, a fact of which Oliver took little note, for now that his confession was made and his glass empty, he felt very drowsy. He closed his eyes. His head drooped. And a minute later he began to snore in alcoholic slumber.

So he wasn't aware of it when his wife returned to the room with an uncapped bottle in her hand. He didn't see her extend her arm and hold the bottle under his nose. Nor did he hear her murmured words, "You've got a spot on your necktie, Oliver. I'll rub it out, darling."

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Another cat story by Lilian Jackson Braun. . . and we can't help asking again: does anyone write more perceptive, more understanding, more just-so stories about cats than Lilian Jackson Braun? She deserves a medal from cat lovers everywhere, and her cats deserve medals from the F.B.I. . .

THE DARK ONE

by LILIAN JACKSON BRAUN

ONLY DAKH WON KNOWS THE true reason for his actions that night on the moonlit path. It is not a cat's nature to be vengeful—or heroic. He merely does what is necessary to secure food, warmth, comfort, peace, and an occasional scratch behind the ears. But Dakh Won is a Siamese, a breed known for its intelligence and loyalty.

He has always been called "the dark one," because his fur is an unusually deep shade of fawn. Between his seal-brown ears and his seal-brown tail, the silky back shades hardly at all. Only his soft underside is pale. He is a husky cat whose strength ripples under his sleek fur, and his slanted eyes are full of sapphire secrets.

During his early life at the cattery Dakh Won enjoyed food, warmth, comfort, attention and—most of all—peace. Then one day, after he was full-grown, he was handed over to strange arms and exposed for the first time to hostility and conflict.

Before he was placed in a basket and carried away, a gentle and familiar voice said, "Dakh Won is very special. I wouldn't sell him to anyone but you, Hilda."

"I'll give him a good home, Elizabeth."

"How about your husband? Does he like animals?"

"He prefers dogs, but I'm the one who needs a pet. Jack's away from home most of the time. All his construction jobs seem to be halfway across the state."

"Honestly, Hilda, I don't know how you stand it in the country. You were always so active when you were a city gal."

"It's lonely, but I have my piano. I wish I could give lessons to the farm children in our community."

"Why don't you? It would be good for you."

"Jack doesn't like the idea."

"Why on earth should he object?"

"Oh, he's funny about some things . . . I hope Dakh Won likes music. Do cats like music?"

"Hilda . . . is everything all

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right with you and Jack? I'm worried about you."

"Of course, everything's all right . . . Now I'd better leave if I'm going to catch that bus. I hope the cat won't mind the ride." Dakh Won was sniffing the strange pair of shoes and nibbling the tantalizing shoelaces. "Isn't that cute, Elizabeth? He's untying my shoes."

"Let me tie them for you."

"Thank you." There was a sigh. "Aren't these oxfords horrible? The doctor says I'll never wear pretty shoes again."

"That was a terrible accident, Hilda—in more ways than one."

"It wasn't really Jack's fault."

"Do you still have pain?"

"Not too much, but I'll always have this ugly limp. That's one reason I don't mind hiding away in the country."

Then Dakh Won was handed over, making a small verbal protest and spreading his toes in mild apprehension; but when he found himself in a covered basket, he settled down and was quiet throughout the long journey. Occasionally he felt reassured by strong fingers that reached into the basket, and he amiably allowed his ears to be flattened and his fur gently ruffled.

Dakh Won's adopted home was a small house overlooking a ravine—a fascinating new world of fringed rugs, cozy heat registers, all kinds of furniture legs for rubbing against, wide window sills, downy sofa pillows, and a grand piano.

At bedtime he sat in this elevated box with half-open lid and gave himself a thorough washing; but after the lights were out, he went upstairs and discovered a soft bed with a warm armpit and a reassuring heartbeat. That was where he slept from then on—except on week-ends.

"Hilda, I'm telling you for the last time. Get that animal out of this bed!"

"He isn't bothering you, Jack. He's over on my side."

"I don't want him in this bedroom! Lock him up in the cellar."

"It's damp down there. He'd howl all night."

"Okay! If that cat's more important than me, I'll go down and bunk on the sofa."

"Don't bother. I'll sleep on the sofa myself."

"Thanks!"

"I knew you'd like the idea."

"Don't slam the door."

Dakh Won jumped out of the warm bed and followed the fuzzy pink bedroom slippers as they moved slowly down the stairs, one careful step at a time. His ears were laid back, and his fur was sharply ridged. He disliked loud voices and the tension that he sensed made him uncomfortable.

Quarreling was not the only discomfort on week-ends. There was the onslaught of feet. Nowhere on the floor could Dakh Won feel safe. He liked to sprawl full length in any patch of sun that warmed the

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rug. The floor was his domain, and feet were expected to detour. But on week-ends his rights were ignored.

One Saturday he waked with a snarl of anguish when a crushing weight came down on the tip of his tail, and the next day he received a cruel blow to his soft underside when he was stretched trustingly in the middle of the hallway.

"Damn that cat! I tripped over him again. I could have broke my leg, Hilda. You hear me?"

"*Broken* your leg. Your grammar is getting to be atrocious."

"Why does he have to camp in the middle of the floor?"

"Why don't you look where you're going? Have you been drinking again?"

"You think more of that stinking beast than you do of me."

"He smells better than that cigar you're smoking."

"It's my house, and I'll smoke what I like and walk where I like, and if that flea bait don't keep out of my way—"

"*Doesn't* keep out of your way."

"If he don't keep out of my way I'll drown him!"

"He doesn't have fleas, and you're not going to touch him! He's mine. I'm not going to die of loneliness in this God-forsaken place. You don't know what it's like to be isolated all week—"

"What's wrong with you women? You want all kinds of labor-saving gadgets, and then you gripe about having nothing to do. Why don't you bake some bread or something instead of buying everything ready-made, if you're so bored?"

"Stop pacing up and down—or else take those clumsy boots off. You're ruining the floor."

"Try scrubbing clothes with a washboard if you're so bored."

"I am a pianist, not a laundress. You seem to forget that I gave up a career to marry you. One of these days I'm going to start giving lessons—"

"And let people think I can't support a—a sick wife?"

"If you'd stop pacing the floor and listen—"

"And have a lot of dirty farmers' kids tramping through this living room? Over my dead body!"

"Look out! You almost stepped on his paw."

"Fool cat!"

Dakh Won soon learned to keep out of sight on week-ends. He hid in the piano, where he was safe from the threat of heavy boots, or he stayed outdoors. He liked high places, and the path that ran along the edge of the ravine was a balcony overlooking Dakh Won's universe. At the bottom of the rocky slope there was a gurgling stream with woods beyond it and mysterious noises in the underbrush.

Dakh Won could sit on the ravine trail for hours, entertaining his senses. He watched a leaf being tickled by the breeze, smelled wild cherries and the toasted aroma of earth warmed by the sun, tasted bit-

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ter grass and the sourness of insects that he caught with his paw, heard the whispers of the soil as a root reached down for moisture.

His ear was also tuned to sounds from the house—the loud and jarring voices, the slamming doors, the stamping of the cruel boots. High-laced, thick-soled, blunt-toed, they made him feel like a small and vulnerable creature.

When the week-end was over, he again felt safe, and—as if he knew he was needed—he stayed close, sitting on the piano bench while fingers danced on the keys and a foot tapped the pedal. The shoes were tied with leather tassels that bounced with every move.

Afternoons he followed the bobbing tassels down the ravine trail. The path was a narrow aisle of well-trodden clay, bordered on one side with wild cherry bushes and on the other with clumps of grass that drooped over the edge of the ravine. The tasseled shoes always walked haltingly down the ravine trail, stopping to rest at a rustic bench before continuing to the wire fence at the end. There was a gate there, and another house beyond, but the tasseled shoes never went farther than the fence.

One day following the afternoon walk, the big round table in the kitchen was set with a single plate and a single cup and saucer, and Dakh Won sat on a chair to watch morsels of food passing from plate to fork to mouth.

"You're good company, Dakh Won. You're my best friend."

He squeezed his eyes.

"You're a big, strong, brave, intelligent cat."

Dakh Won licked a paw and passed it modestly over his face.

"Would you like a little taste of crabmeat?"

With guttural assent Dakh Won sprang to the table top.

"Oh, dear! Cats aren't supposed to jump on tables."

Dakh Won sat primly, keeping a respectful distance from the cream pitcher.

"But it's all right when we're alone—just you and me."

For the rest of the week the meals were companionable events, but when Friday night came, Dakh Won sensed a change in the system. There was a brown tablecloth and brass candlesticks and two plates instead of one. Alone in the kitchen he surveyed the table-setting. The spot he usually occupied was cluttered with dinnerware, but there was plenty of room in the middle. He hopped up lightly, stepped daintily among the dishes, and arranged himself between the candlesticks—a dusky centerpiece on the brown tablecloth.

At that moment there were ominous sounds outdoors. A car had pulled into the yard, crunching on the gravel, and the heavy boots that Dakh Won feared were stamping on the back porch. He made himself into a small motionless bun-

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dle. Bruising boots could not reach him on the table.

The back door opened and banged shut, making a little flapping noise at the impact.

"Hilda! Hilda! Where the devil are you? What's happened to this door, Hilda?"

"Here I am. I was upstairs, dressing."

"Why? Who's coming?"

"Nobody."

"Hilda, what the devil have you done to the back door?"

"That's a cat-hatch. I had it installed so Dakh Won could go in and out. It's hinged, you see—"

"A cat-hatch! I suppose you know you've ruined a perfectly good door! Who made it? Who cut the thing?"

"A very nice man from the farm next door. It didn't cost anything—if that's what you're worried about."

"How did you meet this man? Why didn't it cost anything?"

"Well, I was taking my walk along the ravine, and he was mending the fence around his property, and we started talking. We talked about cats, and he said we ought to have a cat-hatch. So he brought his tools—"

"And you had this man in the house when you were alone?"

"Jack, the man is seventy years old. He has thirteen grandchildren. One of his grandsons wants to study piano, and I'm going to teach that boy whether you like it or not!"

"How old is he?"

"What does that matter?"

"I want to know what goes on here while I'm away."

"Don't be silly, Jack."

"You're not interested in me, so I figure you've got something else going."

"Don't be insulting!—and crude."

"You don't appreciate a real man. You should've married one of those long-haired musicians."

"Jack, you make me tired. Are you going to change clothes, or ruin the floor with those stupid boots?"

"That's a laugh! You cut a hole in the door for that stinking cat—and give me hell for scratching the floor!"

As the voices grew louder, Dakh Won became more and more uncomfortable. He shifted his position nervously.

"Hilda! He's on the table! . . . Scram! Beat it!"

A rough hand swept Dakh Won to the floor, and a ruthless boot thudded into his middle, lifting him into the air.

"Jack! Don't you dare kick that cat!"

"I'm not having no filthy cat on my table!"

Dakh Won scudded through the cat-hatch and across the porch, pausing long enough to lick his quivering body before heading for the ravine. In the weeds alongside the trail he hunched himself into a pensive bundle and listened to the buzzing of evening insects.

Soon he heard the car drive away

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with more than the usual noise, and then he saw the shoes with bobbing tassels limping down the path.

"Dakh Won! Where are you? . . . Poor cat. Are you hurt?"

Strong hands lifted Dakh Won and smoothed his fur. He let himself be hugged tightly, and he flicked an ear when a drop of moisture fell on it.

"I don't know what to do, Dakh Won. I just don't know what to do. I can't go on like this."

The evil boots did not come back that week-end, nor the next, nor the next, but strange feet started walking into the house. The visitors came through the gate at the end of the ravine trail, bringing with them pleasant voices and laughter and small treats for Dakh Won, and they were always careful with their feet.

One night, after an evening of music, the visitors went back down the trail, and Dakh Won stretched sleepily inside the grand piano. Suddenly he raised his head. There was a menacing sound in the darkness outdoors—the familiar rumble of heavy boots on the back porch. They stamped their way uncertainly into the house.

"Jack! . . . So you decided to come back! Where have you been?"

"Whazzit matter?"

"You've been drinking."

"I been drinkin' and thinkin' and drinkin' and—"

Dakh Won heard something crash in the kitchen.

"You're dead drunk! You can't even sit on a chair."

"I wanna find the cat. Where's Stinker? Wanna drown 'im."

"Jack, you'd better leave."

There was another crash, and Dakh Won leaped from the piano, a brown blur streaking through the hallway and out the cat-hatch. Under the back steps he hunched and listened to the anger of the voices.

"Jack, I'm warning you! Don't give me any trouble. Go away from here."

"You tryin' to throw me outa my own house?"

"I'm all through with you. That's final!"

"Whaddaya mean?"

"I'm getting a divorce."

"Good ridd— good riddance! Now I can have some fun."

"You've been having plenty of 'fun.' I know all about that camp trailer you live in. I know what goes on when you're away on a job. You and your tramps!"

"Go 'head! Getta divorce. You're through. Nobody wants you. Nobody wantsa—wantsa cripple."

"*You* made me a cripple! And you're going to pay—and pay—and pay. With the alimony I get from you—"

"You witch!"

"—you won't have a dollar left for tramps—not when the court gets through with you."

"You crippled, ugly witch! I'll smash your fingers!"

"Don't you dare touch me!"

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"I'll kill you—"

"Stop it! . . . *STOP* . . ."

Dakh Won heard the screams and the scuffling feet. Then he saw the tasseled shoes limping hurriedly from the house into the night. They headed for the ravine faster than he'd ever seen them go.

Bounding after them, he heard sobs and moans as the feet hobbled unevenly along the trail toward the gate. The clay path was white in the moonlight, winding between the dark cherry bushes and the blackness of the ravine.

Back in the house there was a fearful din. Then Dakh Won heard the voice bellowing, and he saw the brutal boots staggering across the yard toward the white ribbon of pathway.

Ahead of Dakh Won the tasseled shoes hurried on in panic, and behind him the boots were coming. The cat's ears went back, and his sleek tail became a bushy plume. He stopped in the path and arched his back.

Then unaccountably, with a sudden languor, Dakh Won dropped his body to the ground and lay there, motionless. Where he happened to sprawl there was a streak of shadow across the moonlit path, cast by a wild cherry tree that grew tall, and in this puddle of darkness Dakh Won was an invisible mound of dark fur.

The boots lumbered closer, the voice roaring.

"I'll get you—you witch! I'll kill you!"

Dakh Won closed his eyes. The feet bore down, and the boots stumbled over him, plunging deep into his unprotected side. With a shudder of pain and a snarl of protest, he sprang to his feet—just as the evil boots sailed over him and disappeared. There was a rumbling of loose rocks in the ravine and then only the splash of the rushing stream down below as the cat licked his wounded side.

Only Dakh Won knows the true reason for his actions that night on the ravine trail. It is not a cat's nature to be vengeful—or heroic, but Dakh Won is a Siamese, and when people talk about the fatal accident in the ravine, his sapphire eyes are full of secrets.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Rime of the Ancient Murderer

by RICHARD M. GORDON

After I shot Mr. Ross,
I parted from Fortune and Fame;
My life turned from profit to loss
Although I was hardly to blame.
Would Fate have played me such a trick
For killing Harry, Tom, or Dick?

Though I had no reason for shame,
Though I felt no twinge of remoss,
My friends to me no longer came;
My wife started suit for divoss.
Would Fate have dealt me such a blow
If I had murdered John or Joe?

Now as on my pillow I toss,
I ask myself, "What's in a name?
The thing that we once called A. Ross
By another would smell much the same."
Would Fate have treated me so ill
For homicide on Bob or Bill?

Although I was hardly to blame,
My life turned from profit to loss;
I parted from Fortune and Fame
After I shot Mr. Ross

CHALLENGE

Tell me Reader, Sir or Dame,
Mr. Ross's given name.

ANSWER

It is, as you all know, of coss,
Bad luck to shoot an ALBERT Ross.

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a *NEW* sports detective story by

JULIAN SYMONS

first publication in the United States

We have already brought you two sports detective stories by Julian Symons—one about tennis, the other about prizefighting. Here is the third in the series—a horse racing story, featuring Francis Quarles, a private detective in the classical tradition.

Please don't skip lightly over the words "a private detective in the classical tradition." Francis Quarles is a contemporary investigator in every sense—but he is also in the grand 'tec tradition. It is more than merely nostalgic, it is deeply satisfying to reach a point in a modern detective story where the great sleuth can say: "There was no question of guessing. My suggestion was the result of deduction from observed facts." (Hurrah!)

It is even more nostalgic and even more satisfying to reach a further point in a contemporary detective story where the great manhunter can say: "But we don't have to talk about the case. The case is solved." (Hurrah again!—yes, even though most of us may have failed to observe, may have failed to make the vital deduction, may have not the foggiest notion who the murderer is—indeed, that is perhaps the most satisfying part of the game; we probably wouldn't admit it, but a reader's lot is a happier one when he is willing to play the supporting role of a "Watson" rather than the leading part of a "Sherlock.")

So, in this classically constructed deductive detective story, you will find the three major mysteries of the genre—the mystery of whodunit, the mystery of howdunit, and the mystery of whydunit—all in one dovetailed, integrated, logical pattern. It is as simple as this: one of six suspects is the murderer. But which one?

Happy reading!

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MURDER ON THE RACE COURSE

by JULIAN SYMONS

"WITH MY SON UP HE CAN DO it," Sir Reginald Bartley said emphatically. "There's no better amateur in the country than Harry. I tell you I'm not sorry Baker can't ride him."

There was something challenging in his tone. Trainer Norman Johnson, wooden-faced, bow-legged, said noncommitally, "He can ride, your son, I'm not denying it."

"And Lucky Charm's a fine horse."

"Ay, there's nothing against the horse," Johnson said.

"Then what's the matter with you, man? A few days ago you were keen as mustard, telling me I had a chance of leading in my first Grand National winner. Today you're as enthusiastic as the cat who started lapping a saucer of cream and found it was sour milk."

"I wouldn't want to raise false hopes, Sir Reginald, that's all. Here comes Lucky Charm."

"And here comes Harry."

Private detective Francis Quarles stood with them in the paddock at Aintree and listened to this conversation with interest. Horse racing was one of the few subjects about which he had no specialized knowledge, and he was here only because he had been tracking down the man who later became known as the Liverpool Forger.

Quarles had once cleared up a troublesome series of robberies committed in the chain of department stores owned by Sir Reginald, and when they met again at the Adelphi Hotel the business magnate had invited the private detective to be his guest at Aintree.

In the hotel that morning Quarles had learned that Lucky Charm was a 40-to-1 outsider in this year's Grand National, that his jockey Baker had fallen and thrown out his shoulder on the previous day, and that Lucky Charm would now be ridden by Sir Reginald's son, Harry.

Now he looked at the big-shouldered powerful-looking black horse, with the number 8 on his saddle cloth, being led round by a stable boy. Then he looked at the young man who walked up to them wearing a jacket of distinctive cerise and gold hoops.

"How is it, Harry? All set?" asked Sir Reginald.

"Why not?" Harry Bartley had the kind of dark, arrogant good looks that Quarles distrusted.

"We're all ready to lead him in," Sir Reginald said, with what seemed to Quarles almost fatuous complacency. "We know we've got the horse and the jockey too, Harry my boy."

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Johnson said nothing. Harry Bartley pulled a handkerchief out of his breast pocket and blew his nose.

"Got your lucky charm?" the owner persisted.

"Of course." Harry's voice was slightly blurred, as though he had just had a tooth out. From the same pocket he produced a rabbit's foot, kissed it, and put it back carefully.

"There's Mountain Pride," said Sir Reginald a little wistfully. Mountain Pride, Quarles knew, was the favorite, a bay gelding with a white star on his forehead.

"Time to go." Harry Bartley gave them a casual nod and turned away, walking a little erratically across the paddock to the place where the stable boy stood, holding Lucky Charm. Had he been drinking, Quarles wondered?

"Good luck," his father called. "Better be getting along to the stand." Sir Reginald was a choleric little man, and now his face was purple as he turned to the trainer. "You may not like the boy, but you could have wished him luck."

Johnson's wooden expression did not change. "You know I wish Lucky Charm all the luck there is, Sir Reginald."

"Trouble with Johnson is, he's sulking," Sir Reginald said when they were in the stand. "Insisted Baker should ride the horse when I wanted Harry. I gave way—after all, Baker's a professional jockey. Then, when Baker was injured, he wanted to have some stable boy and I put my foot down."

"What has he got against your son?"

Sir Reginald looked at Quarles out of the corner of one slightly bloodshot eye. "The boy's a bit wild, y'know. Nothing wrong with him, but—a bit wild. There they go."

The horses had paraded in front of the stand and now they were going down to the starting post. Bright March sunlight illuminated the course and even Francis Quarles, who was not particularly susceptible to such things, found something delightful in the scene. The men and women in the stands and the crowd chattering along the rails, the men with their raglans and mackintoshes and the patches of color in women's coats and hats, the ballet-like grace of the horses and the vivid yet melting green of the Aintree background . . .

Quarles pulled himself up on the edge of sentiment. His companion said sharply, "Harry's having trouble."

The horses were at the starting post. Quarles raised his glasses. After a moment he picked out Lucky Charm. The black horse was refusing to get into line with the rest. Three times Harry Bartley brought him up and he turned away.

Sir Reginald tapped his stick on the ground. "Come on now, Harry. show him who's master. Never

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known Lucky Charm to act like this before."

"Is he used to your son?"

The question was not well received. "Harry can ride any horse," Bartley snapped. Then he drew in his breath and his voice joined with thousands of others in the cry, "They're off!"

Now in the stand a mass of binoculars was raised to follow the progress of some thirty horses over some of the most testing fences in the world. Now bookmakers looked anxious, punters let cigars go out, women twisted race cards in gloved hands. Everything depended now on the jumping skill and staying power of horses that had been trained for months in preparation for this day, and on the adeptness of the jockeys in nursing their charges and then urging them forward to moments of supreme endeavor.

The horses came up in a bunch to the first fence, rose to it, cleared it. Thousands of throats exhaled and articulated sighingly the words: "They're over."

They were not all over, Quarles saw. A jockey lay on the ground, a jockey wearing red jacket and white cap. A riderless horse ran on.

On to the second jump and the third, a six-foot ditch with a four-foot-nine fence on the other side of it. Now there was a cry: "O'Grady's down. Double or Quits is down. Bonny Dundee's down."

There were more riderless horses, more jockeys on the ground who stumbled to their feet and ran to the rails when all the horses had passed.

Past Becher's they came and round the Canal Turn and then over Valentine's, the field beginning to string out.

"There's Mountain Pride in front," Sir Reginald cried. "And Johnny Come Lately and Lost Horizon. And Lucky Charm's with them." Almost under his breath he muttered, "But I don't like the way the boy's handling him."

The horses came round toward the stand. Quarles watched the cerise and gold jacket take the fourteenth fence, and it seemed to him that Harry Bartley was not so much riding as desperately clinging to the horse.

They came to the fifteenth fence, the Chair, which is one of the most awkward at Aintree—a six-foot ditch and then a fence five-foot-two in height which rises roughly in a chair's shape.

Mountain Pride soared over, and so did the two horses that followed. Then came the cerise and gold jacket. Lucky Charm rose to the fence and went over beautifully, but as he landed the jockey seemed simply to slip off and lay prone on the turf.

Lucky Charm ran on, the rest of the field thundered by.

Sir Reginald lowered his glasses slowly. "That's that. Not my Grand National, I'm afraid."

Quarles waited for the figure on

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the turf to get up, but it did not move. Ambulance men beside the jump ran onto the course with a stretcher and bent over the jockey. Still he did not move as they lifted him onto the stretcher.

They watched in stupefaction as the ambulance men carried him away. Then Sir Reginald, his usually ruddy face white as milk, said, "Come on, man, come on."

"What about the race?"

"To hell with the race," Sir Reginald cried. "I want to know what's happened to my son."

The limp body of Harry Bartley was carried round to the course hospital, in the administrative block. Doctor Ferguson, the local doctor, had just begun his examination when the door of the ward was pushed open and a handsome gray-haired man, with a pair of binoculars slung round his neck, came in.

"Ferguson? My name's Ramsay, I'm Harry's doctor. We've met before, up here last year. Is the boy badly hurt?"

"As far as I can see he's received no injury at all. There's something very wrong though—his pulse is feeble and irregular. Was he subject to any kind of fits, do you know?"

"Harry? Not to my knowledge." Ferguson made way as Doctor Ramsay approached the body and bent over it. He straightened up with a puzzled frown. "Have you smelled round the nose and mouth?"

"No, I haven't. I'd only begun to examine him." Ferguson bent over too and caught the odor of bitter almonds. "My God, he's taken poison!"

"Taken it—or it's been administered to him." Ramsay's face was grave. "The question is what, and how? It's not cyanide, obviously, or he wouldn't be alive now."

"I must telephone—" Doctor Ferguson broke off as Sir Reginald and Francis Quarles, followed by trainer Norman Johnson, came into the room. Ramsay went over to Sir Reginald and placed a hand on his arm.

"Bartley, I won't mince words. You must be prepared for a shock. Harry has been poisoned in some way, and there's very little we can do for him."

"He'll be all right?"

"It's touch and go," Ramsay said evasively. He watched Francis Quarles approach the body. "Who's that?"

Sir Reginald told him.

Quarles bent over the unconscious figure, looked at its pale face and purple lips and nose, sniffed the scent of bitter almonds. He came over to Ramsay, who had now been joined by Ferguson. Sir Reginald introduced the detective.

"Have you gentlemen made up your minds about this case?" Quarles asked. He spoke in a faintly languid manner which made Ramsay,

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who was brisk and soldierly, bristle slightly.

"Not yet. In your superior wisdom I suppose you have done so."

"Have you considered nitrobenzene?"

"Nitrobenzene," Doctor Ferguson said thoughtfully. "Yes, that would explain the prussic acid symptoms, but I don't see why it should have occurred to you."

"I know little about horse racing, but something about poisoning," Quarles said. "And I had the opportunity of seeing Harry Bartley just before the race. His appearance then seemed to me very strange. His speech was blurred and he walked unsteadily. The thought crossed my mind that he might be drunk, but as you know such an appearance of drunkenness is a common symptom in nitrobenzene poisoning."

There was silence. Ramsay shifted uncomfortably. Sir Reginald said, "What are we waiting for? If there's no ambulance let's get him in to Liverpool in my car."

Ferguson crossed over to Harry Bartley again, felt pulse and heart, and then drew a sheet up over the face.

Ramsay said to Sir Reginald, "He's gone. I wanted to break it gently. There was never any chance."

"But when we came in Ferguson here was telephoning—"

"I was telephoning the police superintendent on the course," Ferguson said. "There'll need to be an investigation. This is a bad business."

Francis Quarles took no part in the flurry of conversation that followed the arrival of the police superintendent and the other officers with him. Instead, he went over to the wooden-faced trainer, Norman Johnson, and took him outside. They paced up and down in hearing of the excited crowds who were cheering the victory of Mountain Pride, and Quarles asked questions.

"Harry Bartley may have died by accident, but I would bet a hundred pounds that he was murdered. Now there's one obvious question I should like to have answered by a racing expert. Is it likely that he was killed to prevent Lucky Charm winning the National?"

Johnson paused for an appreciable time before he said bluntly, "No."

"It's unlikely?"

"You can put it out of your mind. I'm not saying horse racing's pure as snow, Mr. Quarles. Far from it. Horses have been nobbled before now, horses have been doped. But favorites, not forty-to-one outsiders. And horses, not men."

"You mean—?"

"If anyone wanted to stop Lucky Charm they'd go for the horse, not the man. Kill a horse and get caught, you may go to prison. Kill a man—well, it's murder."

"Sir Reginald seemed very opti-

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mistic about his horse's chances in the National. What did you feel?"

The trainer rubbed his chin, making a sound like a saw cutting wood. "With Baker up, he was a good outsider, a nice each-way bet. Hadn't quite the class for it, but you never can tell. He liked Baker, did Lucky Charm."

"And he didn't like Harry Bartley?"

"Hated him. Bartley used the whip more than he needed to. Lucky Charm wasn't a horse you could treat that way. I tried to persuade Sir Reginald to give the ride to another jockey, but it was no good."

"You shared the horse's dislike of Harry Bartley, I gather."

The trainer said nothing. His faded blue eyes stared into the distance, and the Red Indian impassiveness of his features did not change. "Was there a special reason for that?"

Slowly and without passion, Norman Johnson said, "Sir Reginald Bartley is a man I respect and like, none more so. I don't know how he came to have such a son. He couldn't be trusted with a woman, he couldn't be trusted to pay his debts, he was a good rider but he couldn't be trusted to treat a horse decently."

"But there's something personal in your dislike," Quarles insisted.

Johnson brought his blue eyes out of the middle distance and focused them on Quarles. "You'll learn about it soon enough. It might as well be from me. I had a daughter named Mary. She was a good girl until she took up with Harry Bartley. He was always around the stables, every day for weeks, and I was fool enough not to realize what he was after—until Mary went away with him and left me a note. I understood it then well enough. That was six months ago. He walked out on her after a few weeks. She put her head in a gas oven."

"I see."

"When I've worked out my contract with Sir Reginald, I'm asking him to take his horses away."

Quarles said softly, "Some people might call that a motive for murder."

"I don't deny it, Mr. Quarles. It happens that I didn't kill him, that's all." Johnson drove the fist of one hand into the palm of the other, and his voice for the first time vibrated with excitement. "But if you ever find his murderer you'll find he has a personal reason, a reason like mine. For me, I hope you never find him. I say good luck to the man or woman who killed Harry Bartley."

Back in the course hospital Quarles met young Inspector Makepeace, who had been working with him in running down the Liverpool Forger.

Makepeace looked at the private detective with a wry smile. "You

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seem to manage to be where things happen, Mr. Quarles. I understand you saw young Bartley before the race."

Quarles told him the impression he had formed that Bartley might be drunk, and the outcome of his conversation with Johnson. The Inspector listened with interest.

"I should say Johnson's right, and this was almost certainly the working out of a private enmity. As you say, he's got a motive himself, although I'm keeping an open mind about that. In return I don't mind telling you that we've got a pretty good idea of how the poison was administered. Miss Moore here has been very helpful about that. She was engaged to Harry Bartley."

Miss Jennifer Moore had a round innocent face and dark hair. She had been crying. "But Inspector, I only said—"

"Bear with me a moment," Inspector Makepeace asked. Quarles, whose own sense of modesty was conspicuous by its absence, noted mentally that Makepeace had a good opinion of himself. "I don't know whether you know much about nitrobenzene poisoning, Mr. Quarles?"

"I know that nitrobenzene is comparatively easy to make," Quarles answered. "It is generally taken in the form of a liquid although it is equally poisonous as a vapor. I remember the case of a young man who spilled nitrobenzene on his clothes, became stupefied, finally collapsed in coma and died. But the most interesting thing about it is that there is an interval between taking the poison and its effects appearing, which can vary from a quarter of an hour to three hours, or longer in the case of vapor. Is that what you were going to tell me?"

The Inspector laughed a little uncomfortably. "You're a bit of a walking encyclopedia, aren't you? That's pretty much what I was going to say, yes. You see, if we can trace the course of Bartley's eating and drinking today we should be able to see when he took the poison. Now it so happens that we can do just that. Doctor Ramsay, would you come over here, please?"

The poker-backed doctor came forward.

"I understand Harry Bartley came to see you this morning."

Ramsay nodded. "I'm staying with friends a couple of miles outside Liverpool. Harry rang me up this morning before nine o'clock. He was pretty jittery, wanted something to pep him up. He was out at the place I'm staying before half-past nine and I gave him a couple of pills, and put two more in a box for him in case he needed to take them before the race."

"They were in his clothes in the changing room," Makepeace said to Quarles with a smile. "I can see your eyes fixed thoughtfully on Doctor Ramsay, but Ferguson here assures me that any pills taken at

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half-past nine must have had effect well before the time of the race. Now, follow the course of events, Quarles. Bartley returned to the hotel by ten o'clock, met Miss Moore in the lobby, and said that he was going up to his room to write some letters. She arranged to pick him up at about twelve, because they were going to a cocktail party. She picked him up then and they went to the party, which was given by a friend of theirs named Lapetaine. There, Miss Moore can testify, Harry Bartley drank just one glass of orange juice."

"What about lunch?" Quarles asked the girl.

She shook her head. "Harry was worried about making the weight. He came and watched Bill and me eat lunch and didn't touch anything, not so much as a piece of toast or a glass of water."

"Bill?"

She colored slightly. "Doctor Ramsay and I have known each other for years. He can bear out what I say. We had lunch on the course, and after it Harry went off to the changing room. Of course he may have drunk something after that."

"Most unlikely," Ferguson said. "Particularly if he was worried about making the weight."

"So you see we're down to the one glass of orange juice." The Inspector smoothed his fair hair with some complacency.

"Apparently," Quarles agreed. "At lunch, did he show any sign of confusion, blurred speech, unsteady walk—anything like that?"

Both Ramsay and Jennifer Moore returned decided negatives.

"Come on now, Mr. Quarles," Makepeace said with a smile. "The fact is you're reluctant to admit that the police are ever quick off the mark, and this time we've surprised you."

"It isn't that, my dear Inspector. Something's worrying me, and I don't quite know what it is. Something that I've seen, or that's happened or that's been said. I shall be interested to know the result of the post-mortem."

"The P.M.?" The Inspector was startled. "Surely you don't doubt that—"

"That he died of nitrobenzene poisoning? No, I don't, but there's still something that tantalizes me about it. Ah, here are his personal possessions."

The detective paused by a table on which a number of articles lay in two separate piles. One of them contained the things Bartley had been wearing during the race, the other came from his clothes in the changing room.

In the first pile were Lucky Charm's saddle, the cerise and gold shirt and cap, and the breeches Bartley had been wearing. Here too, isolated and pathetic, was the rabbit's-foot charm he had kissed; it was neatly ticketed: *Found in pocket.*

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The things in the other pile were naturally more numerous—sports jacket, vest, shirt and gray trousers, gold wrist watch, keys on a ring, silver and copper coins, a wallet with notes and other papers, three letters.

Inspector Makepeace picked up one of these letters and handed it to Quarles.

It was a letter written in a sprawling hand by a woman who had used violet ink, and it was full of bitter reproaches, in painfully familiar phrasing. "Cast me off like an old shoe . . . given you everything a woman can give . . . shan't let you get away with it . . . sooner see you dead than married to somebody else."

Why is it, Quarles wondered, that at times of strong emotion, almost all of us express ourselves in clichés? The letter began "Darling Harry" and was signed "Hilary."

"You haven't traced the writer of this letter yet?" The undercurrent of sarcasm in Quarles's voice was so faint that Inspector Makepeace missed it.

"Give us a chance, Mr. Quarles. Between you and me I'm not inclined to attach too much importance to it—shouldn't be surprised to learn that there were half a dozen women in Master Harry's life. I'm more interested in getting a complete list of guests at that cocktail party. Nothing very informative here, I'm afraid."

"On the contrary," Quarles said.

Makepeace stared. "You mean there's something I've missed—"

"You haven't missed anything, but something's missing that should be here. You should be able to deduce it yourself. Now I'm more anxious than ever to know the result of the post-mortem."

Sir Reginald Bartley paced up and down the drawing room of his suite. His voice had lost none of its vigor, but his appearance was pitiably different from that of the jaunty man who had talked about leading in the Grand National winner twenty-four hours earlier. There was an unshaved patch on his chin, his face was pallid and his hand trembled slightly.

"I want this murderer caught," he said. "I want to see him in the dock. I want to hear the judge pronounce sentence on him. That police Inspector is smart, but I believe you're smarter, Quarles. I want you to investigate this case, and if you catch the man who poisoned my son you can write your own ticket."

Quarles looked at him intently. "Why do you call it a man? There is a general belief that most poisoners are women."

"Man or woman." Sir Reginald made an impatient gesture to indicate that this was merely splitting hairs. "I want them in the dock."

"Then you'll have to be franker with me than you have been so far. You might begin by telling me what you know about Hilary."

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"Hilary?" Sir Reginald's surprise seemed genuine. "That's not a name I've ever heard in relation to Harry."

"She wrote an interesting letter to your son." Quarles did not pursue the point. "Norman Johnson said that your son behaved very badly to his daughter."

Sir Reginald blew his nose emphatically. "She was a foolish girl, wouldn't leave him alone. I'm not denying that Harry was sometimes wild. But there was never any real harm in him."

"Johnson's story was that your son lured this girl away from home, lived with her for a short time, then walked out on her. Do you accept that?"

"I've really no idea. Harry was of age. I knew little about that side of his life. I don't see," he added stiffly, "that it's our place to sit in moral judgment on him."

"It's not a question of moral judgment," Quarles said patiently. "I'm trying to get at facts. What do you think of Miss Moore?"

"A very nice girl, very nice indeed," said Sir Reginald emphatically.

"She'd only recently become engaged to your son, I believe?"

"About three weeks ago, yes. She is—was—very much in love with him."

"Doctor Ramsay had known her for years?"

"Yes. Known Harry for many years too, for that matter, ever since he was a boy. Good chap, Ramsay, pulled me through a bad go of pneumonia a couple of years ago, just after my wife died."

Quarles stood up. His eyes, hard and black, stared at Sir Reginald, who bore their gaze uneasily. "I accept the commission. But you will realize, Sir Reginald, that I am no respecter of persons. You are engaging me to discover the truth, regardless of consequences."

Sir Reginald repeated after him, "Regardless of consequences."

In the hotel lobby Quarles heard himself being paged. He stopped the boy and was told that Miss Moore was in the lounge and would like to speak to him. He found her talking in a deserted corner of the room to a dark-skinned, rather too beautifully dressed young man, with a fine large nose.

"This is Jack Lapetaine, who was Harry's great friend," she said. "As a matter of fact, it was through Jack that I met Harry, and it was Jack who gave the cocktail party yesterday."

"Is that so?" Quarles looked at Lapetaine with interest, wondering about his ancestry. Indian perhaps? Turkish? "Are you a racing man, Mr. Lapetaine?"

"I am an art dealer." Lapetaine smiled, showing pointed yellowish teeth. "But I am interested in horse racing, yes. I like the excitement. I like to gamble, I was very fond of Harry. So I came up for the Na-

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tional. I am almost ashamed of it, but I had a good win."

"You backed Mountain Pride?"

"I did. I had just a little flier on Lucky Charm, for sentiment's sake as you might say, but I did not think he had quite—how shall I put it?—the class for the race."

"You watched it, of course?"

"No, Mr. Quarles." Lapetaine looked down at his elegant suede shoes. "I was engaged on urgent business."

Jennifer Moore said impatiently, "Look here, Mr. Quarles, there's something I want you to tell me. Has Sir Reginald asked you to investigate this case?" Quarles nodded. "I hope you won't."

"Why not?"

"It can't possibly do any good. Harry's dead, and nothing can bring him back. And it might —well, might embarrass people who haven't any connection with it."

Lapetaine listened with a malicious smile. Quarles said quietly, "I see. Your engagement is very recent, isn't it, Miss Moore?"

"Harry and I met for the first time five weeks ago. It sounds silly, I expect, but we fell in love at first sight. Within a fortnight we were engaged."

"Should I be right in thinking that Doctor Ramsay feels some affection for you, and that you are afraid my investigations may involve him?"

Still with that slightly objectionable smile, Lapetaine said, "I can tell you exactly what Jennifer is afraid of. Ramsay has been sweet on her for years. Now, you know that Harry went out to see Ramsay on the morning of the race to get some pep tablets. What was to stop Ramsay from giving him two more, one of them filled with nitrobenzene, and saying, 'Take one of these at twelve thirty, my boy, and you'll ride as you've never ridden before.' It simply happened that Harry took the poisoned tablet first. The timing would be just about right."

The girl buried her face in her hands. "You shouldn't have—"

"My dear, Mr. Quarles is an intelligent man. I should be surprised if that idea had not already occurred to him."

Quarles looked at him. "You seem to know a good deal about the operation of nitrobenzene, Mr. Lapetaine."

Unperturbed, the art dealer showed his teeth. "I trained for a medical degree in youth before I—what shall I say?—discovered my vocation."

"There are certain objections to that idea," Quarles began, when a page boy came running up.

"Mr. Quarles, sir. Telephone for you."

On the telephone Quarles heard Inspector Makepeace's voice, raw with irritation. "We've got the result of the P.M. I don't know how you guessed, but you were perfectly right."

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"There was no question of guessing," Quarles said indignantly. "My suggestion was the result of deduction from observed facts."

"Anyway, it seems to leave us just where we began."

"Oh, no," Quarles said softly. "I have told you exactly what happened before and during the race. Surely it leaves only one possible explanation."

He went back to the lounge, and addressed Jennifer Moore. "You need not worry any further, Miss Moore, about Doctor Ramsay or anyone else having administered a poisonous pill to Harry Bartley. I have just learned the result of the post-mortem. There was only a trace of nitrobenzene in the stomach."

They looked at him in astonishment, Lapetaine with his mouth slightly open. "I will spell out the meaning of that for you. Harry Bartley was not poisoned by a pill or by the orange juice he drank at your cocktail party, Mr. Lapetaine. He was poisoned by nitrobenzene, yes, but in the form of vapor."

Lapetaine had been surprised by Quarles's revelation but, as the detective admitted to himself with some admiration, the art dealer was a cool card. After the initial shock he nodded.

"Will you excuse me? I must remember to make a note of an appointment." He scribbled something on a sheet of paper torn from a pocket diary and said with a smile, "I am relieved. You will no longer suspect me of poisoning my guest's orange juice, which would hardly have been playing the game, as you might say."

Jennifer Moore seemed bewildered. "I thought it must be the orange juice. If it was vapor, then —well, I simply don't understand. Perhaps it was an accident."

"It was not an accident," Francis Quarles said. "You can see that my investigations may be useful after all, Miss Moore."

"I suppose so," she said a little doubtfully. "Goodbye, Mr. Quarles."

Lapetaine held out his hand to say goodbye, and when Quarles took it he found a piece of paper in his palm. He opened it after they had turned away, and saw that it was the paper torn from Lapetaine's diary.

On it the art dealer had scribbled: *Can you meet me in ten minutes at Kismet Coffee House, down the street?*

Ten minutes later Quarles pushed open the door of the Kismet Coffee House. In one of the cubicles he found the darkly handsome Lapetaine, drinking black coffee.

"Mr. Quarles, you'll think me immensely mysterious, but—"

"Not at all. It was plain enough from your note that you wanted to

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talk to me when Miss Moore was not present. From that I deduce that you want to talk about a woman connected with Harry Bartley, and that it would upset Miss Moore to hear about her. I admit, however, that I am making no more than an informed guess when I suggest that her name is Hilary."

Lapetaine looked at Quarles with his mouth open, then laughed unconvincingly. "My word, Mr. Quarles, it's not much use trying to keep secrets from you. I didn't know you'd ever heard of Hilary Hall."

"I didn't say that I had. But now that you have told me her full name, you may as well go on with the story. I take it that she was a friend of Harry Bartley's."

"She certainly was. Hilary's a night-club singer, the star at the Lady Love, which is a newish club just off Piccadilly. She's a red-head with a tremendous temper. When she heard that Harry was engaged to be married, she really hit the roof. Harry had played around with a lot of girls in his time, you know."

Quarles nodded. "I do know. But about Miss Hall."

Lapetaine leaned forward. "This I'll bet you *don't* know, Mr. Quarles, and neither does anybody else. Hilary Hall came up here the day before the race, and she came to make trouble. She telephoned Harry that evening and he went to see her, tried to quiet her down, but without much effect. She rang Harry again at that cocktail party I gave the morning before the race, but I spoke to her. I spent the afternoon of the race arguing with her." Lapetaine smiled. "She finally agreed that a thousand pounds might help to soothe her injured feelings. I think you should talk to her."

"I think so too. Why didn't you give this information to the police, Mr. Lapetaine?"

The art dealer looked down at his shoes. "I didn't think Hilary could be involved, but after what you tell me about vapor—I don't know. If I'm going to get into any trouble myself, then with me it's strictly Number One. Hilary's gone back to London. You'll find her at the Lady Love night club."

Francis Quarles talked on the telephone to the owner of the Lady Love, then took a plane from Liverpool to London. He arrived at the night club, caught a glimpse of a cabaret-turn ending, and pushed his way backstage among a crowd of blondes and brunettes, wondering as he had often done before why a dozen half-dressed girls should be so much less attractive than one.

He tapped on the door of a room that was labeled *Miss Hall*. A deep, harsh voice said "All right."

Hilary Hall was sitting in front of a looking glass and her reflection frowned out at him. Her beauty was like a physical blow after the

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commonplace prettiness of the dancing girls outside. Yet on a second look it was not really beauty, Quarles saw, but simply the combination of flaming red hair, a milk-white skin, and certain unusual physical features—the thick brows that almost met in the middle, the jutting red underlip, the powerful shoulders.

This was a woman whom you could imagine as a murderess, although such an exercise of the imagination, as Quarles well knew, could easily be misleading.

"I was told you were coming," she said in that rusty, attractive voice. "And I've seen your picture in the papers. What do you want?"

"I would like you to answer some questions."

"I'm on in ten minutes. You've got till then." She had not turned round.

Quarles said, "I can put it simply. You were in love with Harry Bartley. You wrote him a threatening letter after his engagement. You went up to Liverpool to cause trouble."

Her thick brows were drawn together. "So what? He's dead now. I never went near the course, Mr. Detective."

Quarles said softly, "He came to see you the night before the race."

She swung round now and faced him. Her eyes were snapping with temper. She looked magnificent. "Of course he did, after I'd rung him up. He came to pour out all his troubles and say how sorry he was it had to be goodbye. He didn't want to marry that silly little bit he'd got engaged to. She had money, that was all. Can you imagine any man preferring her to me?"

She paused and Quarles, although not particularly susceptible, felt a kind of shiver run down his back.

"He had other troubles too," she said. "A frightful cold that he was afraid might develop into flu and make it difficult for him to ride that damned horse. Said he'd have to do something about it. Altogether, he was pretty low."

"You were very much in love with him?"

Looking down at her scarlet fingernails she said, "He was a man."

With a deprecating cough Quarles said, "But you were prepared to accept a thousand pounds to soothe your feelings."

She struck the dressing table sharply with a clenched fist. "That filthy Paul Lapetaine's been talking to you. He was after me himself, but he never got to first base. I like men, not dressed-up dolls. Yes, I said I'd take the money. I need it. I knew Harry would never put a ring on my finger. You can think what you like about it."

"What I think," Quarles said abruptly, "is that you're an honest woman."

Her heavy frown changed into a smile. "You're all right."

A head poked through the door

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and a voice said, "On in two minutes, Miss Hall."

"Look here," she said, "I'm on now, but why don't you stay here? We'll talk afterwards, have a drink. I want to find Harry's murderer as much as you do."

"I should be delighted to have a drink, and honored if you would allow me to take you out to supper," Francis Quarles said. "But we don't have to talk about the case. The case is solved."

Quarles's secretary, Molly Player, was a neatly attractive—but not too attractive—blonde. He had told her something about the people involved in the case, and now as the suspects arrived and she took them all in to Quarles's office overlooking Trafalgar Square, she found some amusement in comparing the detective's remarks with the reality.

Sir Reginald came first, pale and anxious ("self-made man, vulgar and cocky, but really cut to pieces by his son's death," Quarles had said), and he was closely followed by Doctor Ramsay ("every inch a soldier, so military he seems phoney, but in fact he was an army doctor, and a good one").

Then came Jennifer Moore wearing a becoming amount of black, accompanied by elegant Paul Lapetaine. "She looks and talks like a mouse, but that doesn't mean she *is* a mouse," Quarles had said thoughtfully of Miss Moore. Lapetaine he had dismissed briskly. "One of nature's spivs."

Then, on her own, in a glory of furs and radiating bright sex, Hilary Hall. "You can't miss *her*, Molly, any more than you can miss the sun coming out," Quarles said. "An orange sun," he added as an afterthought. "High in the sky, a scorcher."

Last of all, Norman Johnson, the brown-faced bowlegged trainer of Lucky Charm. About him Quarles's comment had been tersest of all. "Poker face."

Molly Player let them all in. Then she sat down and tried to type a report, but found herself making a number of mistakes. She remembered Quarles's last words to her: "One of these six, Molly, is a murderer."

Francis Quarles sat back in the big chair behind his desk, and said pleasantly to the six people, "One of you is a murderer."

His office was large, but it had only four chairs for visitors, so that Paul Lapetaine stretched his elegant legs from a stool, and Doctor Ramsey sat in a window-seat from which he could look down on the square far below with its pigeons, its children, and its lions. Jennifer Moore sat next to Ramsay, as far away as possible from Hilary Hall.

"It may be of interest to you all," Quarles continued didactically, "to know how I discovered the murderer, after Sir Reginald had en-

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gaged me to investigate.

"I considered first the question of motive, and I found that five of you had motives for killing Harry Bartley. Johnson, trainer of the horse he rode, hated him because Bartley had treated his daughter badly. Miss Hall had been thrown over by Bartley, and had written him a threatening letter.

"Miss Moore might have discovered that Bartley went to see Miss Hall on the night before the race. She looks like a quiet young lady, but quiet young ladies have been known to poison through jealousy.

"Paul Lapetaine, I should judge, was jealous of Bartley's success with women, and especially with Hilary Hall. Doctor Ramsay was obviously fond of Miss Moore, and had been for years. He must have had bitter feelings when he learned that she was going to marry a man like Harry Bartley."

Ramsay on his window-seat made a motion of protest. Sir Reginald said, "You have no right to talk about my son like that."

Quarles's voice was harsh. "I'm sorry, Sir Reginald. I told you that this inquiry might be disagreeable for you. I don't condone murder, but I must admit that your son strikes me as an unpleasant character.

"Let us move on from motive to opportunity. Bartley was killed by nitrobenzene, and it was thought at first that he had drunk the poison in a glass of orange juice, or perhaps taken it in the form of a pill. There was a thought in Miss Moore's mind, or perhaps Lapetaine put it there, that Doctor Ramsay might have given Bartley a tablet filled with nitrobenzene when Bartley came to see him early on the morning of the race.

"The post-mortem proved conclusively that this idea was mistaken. Dr. Ramsay's pills were perfectly harmless. Bartley had not been killed by nitrobenzene introduced into his stomach. He had been poisoned by it in the form of vapor.

"This was the essential feature of the crime. The last vital clue, however, was provided by Miss Hall. She told me that on the night before the race, when Bartley came to see her, he complained of a bad cold that he feared might develop into influenza."

There was silence in the room. Then Jennifer Moore said timidly, "I suppose I knew that too. I mean, I knew Harry was sniffing a lot and had a bit of a cold, but I still don't understand why it should be important—vital, you said."

"Quite early in the case I said that I remembered an affair in which a young man spilled nitrobenzene on his clothes, became stupefied, collapsed in coma, and died. Something like that happened to Harry Bartley."

"His clothes weren't poisoned." That was Johnson, speaking for the first time.

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"No. He was killed by a handkerchief impregnated with nitrobenzene, which he used frequently because he had a cold."

Hilary Hall objected, in her rusty voice, "I don't believe that that points to anybody in particular."

"There are two other things I should tell you. When I met Harry Bartley in the paddock I noticed that he used a handkerchief to wipe his nose. After the race, when his things were laid out on a table, the handkerchief was no longer there."

"It came out when he fell from the horse," Ramsay suggested.

"No. Because the rabbit's foot which he had tucked into his pocket at the same time was still there. The handkerchief had been taken away—stolen."

Sir Reginald rubbed his chin. "I may be slow, but I simply don't see how that can be possible. Nobody came near Harry's body—" He stopped.

"That isn't true," Quarles said. "But it is true that only one person fulfills all *five* of our murderer's qualifications. He had to be a person who disliked Harry Bartley. He had to possess some knowledge of the properties of nitrobenzene. He had to know that Bartley had a cold, and would frequently wipe his nose with a handkerchief. He had to be a person from whom Bartley would have accepted a handkerchief—having been told that it was impregnated with what our murderer might have said was oil of eucalyptus, good for a cold. Finally, he had to be a person who had access to Harry Bartley very soon after he collapsed. He was able to bend over the body—making an examination, shall we say?—and steal the handkerchief.

"The police are outside, Doctor Ramsay. It's no good trying to use that gun in your hip pocket."

Doctor Ramsay was on his feet now, and the gun was in his hand. "I'm not sorry for what I did," he said. "Not in the least. Harry was a dirty little devil with girls, had been since he was a boy. I'd always loved you, Jennifer, although I've never said it. In the wrong age group, I know. When I heard he'd got hold of you I just couldn't stand it. Don't come near me, now. I don't want to hurt anybody else."

"Bill." Jennifer Moore held out a hand to him. "Please don't—"

Ramsay flung up the window. "You don't think I'm going to endure the farce of a trial, do you? It's better this way, for me and for everybody else."

He stepped out onto the ledge, and looked for a moment at the pigeons and the children, the placid lions and Nelson on his pillar.

Then he jumped.

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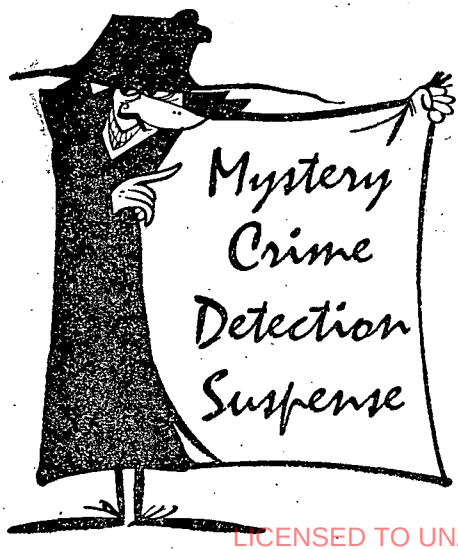

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

According to Mystery Writers of America, the best suspense novel of 1965 was English: Adam Hall's THE QUILLER MEMORANDUM (Simon & Schuster, $4.50). According to the Crime Writers Association of London, it was American: Ross Macdonald's THE FAR SIDE OF THE DOLLAR (Knopf, $3.95). Certainly both novels are excellent (each received 4 stars here); and you'd be foolish to miss either of them—or any of the runners-up that narrowly missed an award. Which are, according to MWA, Len Deighton's FUNERAL IN BERLIN (Putnam's, $4.95), Dorothy Salisbury Davis' THE PALE BETRAYER (Scribner's, $3.95), Mary Stewart's AIRS ABOVE THE GROUND (Mill-Morrow, $4.95), H. R. F. Keating's THE PERFECT MURDER CASE (Dutton, $3.95; Signet P2884, 60¢), which won CWA's top award last year, and Macdonald's FAR SIDE; and according to CWA, Gavin Lyall's MIDNIGHT PLUS ONE (Scribner's, $4.50), Dick Francis' FOR KICKS (Harper & Row, $3.95), and Emma Lathen's ACCOUNTING FOR MURDER (Macmillan, $3.95).

There's a splendid summer reading list for you; and you might add MWA's American first novels: the top prize (the "Edgar") to John Ball for IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT (Harper & Row, $3.50), with runners-up's scrolls to Alexandra Roudybush for BEFORE THE BALL WAS OVER (Crime Club, $3.50), Jack D. Hunter for THE EXPENDABLE SPY (Dutton, $4.95), and EQMM contributor Vincent McConnor for THE FRENCH DOLL (Hill & Wang, $3.95).

★★★★ **THE CANDY MURDER CASE, *by Paul Holmes*** (Bantam SZ3307, 75¢)

Incredible journalistic feat: a detailed study of a sensational murder trial (the Mossler case in Miami) published 3 days after the jury brought in its verdict! What's even more astonishing, it's a good, solid, intelligent book on a fascinating (and still baffling) case.

★★★★ **THE PEDESTAL, *by Geoge Lanning*** (Harper & Row, $4.50)

Curious and powerful blend of the supernatural and the psychiatric chiller, beautifully written, and terrifying on both its levels.

★★★★ **THE INCREDIBLE SCHLOCK HOMES, by Robert L. Fish** (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)

I wrote the introduction to this book; but who needs to introduce the

(*Continued on next page*)

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magnificent Schlock to EQMM readers? 12 stories from these pages, 1960-64; the cleverest and funniest pastiches in the history of crime.

★★★★ **HOUSE ON GREENAPPLE ROAD, *by Harold R. Daniels*** (Random, $3.95)

Strikingly successful effort to create murder fiction in the penetrating ironic manner of the best fact-crime, with a memorable full-length portrait of a self-destroying woman.

★★★★ **EIGHTY MILLION EYES, *by Ed McBain*** (Delacorte, $3.50)

The title story (EQMM May) combines with a contrasting case to form a strong, vivid contrapuntal novel, best of this series in recent years.

EQMM took two of MWA's four awards for short stories. The Edgar went to Shirley Jackson's posthumous "The Possibility of Evil" (*Saturday Evening Post*), with scrolls to Charlotte Armstrong's "The Case for Miss Peacock" (EQMM), Brian Cleeve's "Foxer" (SEP), and Holly Roth's "Who Walks Behind" (EQMM). The EQMM stories will appear in EQ's next anthology, the others in my next annual BEST DETECTIVE STORIES.

★★★ **THE MONKEY AND THE TIGER, *by Robert van Gulik*** (Scribner's, $3.50)

Two novelets of Judge Dee in Seventh Century China, adroit in plot and rich in an alien culture.

★★★ **NAMELESS ENEMY, *by Frances Shelley Wees*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Canadian veteran's best novel: a genuinely *puzzling* mystery, intricate, logical and constantly surprising.

★★★ **THE PAPER DOLLS, *by L. P. Davies*** (Crime Club, $3.95)

Detection mingled with science fiction in effectively underplayed terror-thriller of new race that may destroy humanity.

★★★ **WICKED AS THE DEVIL, *by Kyle Hunt*** (Macmillan, $3.95)

Under this pseudonym, John Creasey writes pointedly of Dr. Emmanuel Cellini and (to quote Miss Jackson above) the possibility of evil in ordinary life—this time a bridegroom who may be a bluebeard.

MWA fact-crime awards: Edgar to Truman Capote's IN COLD BLOOD (Random, $5.95)—a 1966 book but, the judges explain, serialized in '65. Scrolls to MURDERERS: SANE & MAD, by EQMM's Miriam Allen deFord (Abelard-Schuman, $5); A LITTLE GIRL IS DEAD, by Harry Golden (World, $5); THE POWER OF LIFE OR DEATH, by Michael V. DiSalle with Lawrence G. Blochman (Random, $4.95); and THE CENTURY OF THE DETECTIVE, by Jurgen Thorwald (Harcourt, Brace & World, $8.95).

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Here is the fifth in the new spy-and-counterspy series about Rand, the Double-C man, the head of the Department of Concealed Communications . . . and it might now be said that the deeper elements of Rand's character are beginning to reveal themselves: he is not always happy in his job.

THE SPY WHO CAME TO THE END OF THE ROAD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE AMAZON JUNGLE WAS HOT and steamy that day. Though it was autumn in London, the weather here, just below the equator, rarely varied from the moist, languid heat that kept wise travelers far away. It was a day like any other for the scientists who worked on the project, with the urgency of Pearl Harbor still a month in the future.

In the very center of the compound was a large cement-lined pool with a plank across it. Two white men, stripped to the waist because of the excessive heat, were working on the plank, throwing food to their charges in the water below. A third man, also white, stood at the edge of the pool, one foot on its concrete rim, speaking to the others in English. From time to time one of the men on the plank would chuckle.

After a while the third man glanced at his watch. He knew that time was running short. He made some casual comment to the two on the plank and pointed to the sky—a tiny patch of blue in the overhanging trees. When they looked upward, the man on the rim of the pool kicked out with his foot, catching the edge of the plank where it rested against the cement.

The two men on the plank screamed as they fell, and when they hit the water there was a sort of flash, and then another. It was as if someone were taking photographs with a flash bulb beneath the water. The man at the edge watched for some time, but there was no human movement in the pool. Nothing but the vague, shadowed motions of the creatures who lived there . . .

Colonel Nelson leaned back in his chair and sighed. "You have to realize, Rand, that the whole thing happened nearly twenty-five years ago."

Rand lit one of his American cigarettes. "Suppose you tell it to me from the beginning, Colonel."

"The beginning? That would be 'way back somewhere, when Hitler

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put half the scientists in Germany to work on secret weapons. Do you know they had nearly a hundred different projects going?—everything from rocket planes to infrared guns. But the one that concerned us the most—still concerns us, for that matter—was the Nazi experimentation with nerve gas. They had a factory at Dyhernfurth, near the Polish border, where they perfected a nerve gas called G.B. Unfortunately, the plant and the supply of gas both fell into the hands of the Russians after the war."

"Do you really think they'd use it?"

Colonel Nelson thought about it for a moment. "I don't know. Perhaps not, but the Americans have been quite concerned about G.B. ever since our agents discovered the Nazi research back in 1939. Two years later, just a few months before Pearl Harbor, the curator of the New York Aquarium and a doctor on assignment for the U.S. Army Chemical Corps started a unique project in the heart of the Amazon jungle. There they set up a research center and hired natives to capture electric eels from the shallow jungle tributaries of the Amazon."

"Electric eels?" Rand stared in disbelief. "What in hell do they have to do with nerve gas?"

"The exact nature of the research is still highly classified, but it had to do with finding an antidote for G.B. Actually, a sort of antidote was developed—an automatic device for injecting atropine into the victim's bloodstream—but it seems to be only partially effective. The research is still going on."

"With electric eels?"

"With electric eels. They were secretly transported after the war from the jungle to the U.S. Army chemical laboratories at Edgewood, Maryland. Only recently we've set up a research center in Scotland as well, and that's where you come in."

"I do?" Rand's business was communications, not ichthyology, but he was willing to listen. "How?"

"Two men—the curator and the doctor—died in the jungle back in '41. Somehow they fell into the eel pool and were electrocuted. It was only one of a series of sabotage attempts aimed at the entire project, and it was the main reason for moving the eels to a research center in the United States. Someone doesn't just happen to sneak into a research compound in the middle of the Amazon jungle. Obviously, one of the workers was a Nazi spy, and we believe he killed those two men. Later, in the American center, another worker, an anti-Nazi German, was also killed by the eels. It was probably another murder."

"I always thought it was a myth about electric eels having enough of a charge to kill someone."

"It's no myth. I've studied up on it for this assignment. The *electrophorus electricus* grows to a length

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of eight or ten feet, and weighs perhaps as much as ninety pounds. It can discharge anywhere from 400 to 650 volts at one ampere—enough to kill a man instantly on contact."

"A tidy murder weapon, if that's what it was in those three cases. What about the spy? What happened to him?"

"His name at the time was Schultz. He was posing as a German Jew who'd fled Hitler and been living with the Jewish community in the Dominican Republic. He claimed some knowledge of fish in general and eels in particular, which was why he was hired as an assistant on the project."

"No security clearance?"

"The Nazi government would not have been too cooperative regarding his background. In those days a good many men had to be employed pretty much on faith. In any event, he was at the Amazon camp at the time of the first two killings, and later in Maryland when the third man was killed. It's possible the third man was someone he'd known in Germany—someone who recognized him."

"I gather this Schultz has dropped from sight."

"He left the American project some ten or twelve years ago, and hasn't been seen or heard of since. I gather the Americans had finally gotten some evidence on him and were about to close the trap. Anyway, the whole eel business was eventually abandoned until just recently when the British government opened a research station in the Scottish highlands, with American cooperation. Apparently there's evidence that the Russians are active with nerve gas research again."

"Where does Schultz come in now?"

"We hope he doesn't. He'd be about 60 years old today, and after fifteen years with those eels, pretty much of an expert on the subject. But he might be working for the Russians now."

"Why do you say that?"

"Simply because he stayed on with the American project for so many years after the war ended. Either somebody new had started paying him, or he just decided he liked eels. We have to assume the Russians might have acquired his dossier along with that nerve gas factory and taken over control of him."

"You still haven't told me why this is an assignment for Double-C." Rand was growing more restless, anxious to be back in the far simpler world of codes and blackboards and frequency tables that was the office of the Department of Concealed Communications.

"I'll get to the point," Colonel Nelson said with a smile. "They've just taken on a man who might be Schultz. He's German, gives his age as 62, looks a little like Schultz's old photographs. Most important, he seems to know everything there is to know about electric eels."

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"Can't they check his fingerprints?"

"Oddly enough, no. You see, Schultz was clever. When he was helping on the Amazon project, he somehow managed to get someone else's prints on his record card. When the F.B.I. became suspicious and wanted to check further on the project workers some ten years back, they discovered they had two sets of prints belonging to a Columbia professor and no set belonging to Schultz. That's when he vanished."

"So this new employee might be Schultz. Am I supposed to find out if he is?"

Colonel Nelson nodded, brushing a hand through his thinning hair. "Exactly."

"I don't think I'm really qualified for this assignment, Colonel."

"Oh, but you are! You see, this man gives his name as Hans Suffern. He claims he served during World War II with the secret French underground organization, the Prosper Network. As you know, most of the Prosper Network was discovered and destroyed by the Germans, and the survivors have died or disappeared. But this man claims he handled their message center. If anyone can trap him in a lie, you can."

"It would be a negative sort of proof at best."

"That's all we need, on something as sensitive as the eel project."

"Doesn't it have some other designation?" Rand asked distastefully. "I'm not too fond of eels."

"Suffern—or Schultz—is. In fact, he told someone that he likes eels better than people."

"Fine," Rand said. "I'm looking forward to meeting him."

The ride through the Scottish highlands never failed to fascinate Rand. He'd come trout fishing in the lochs one summer, and returned almost annually to rest among the peaceful hills. This day, like so many in summer, was bright and cloudless, with only the wind to keep it from being a perfect afternoon.

Rand slowed down as he passed one of the flat dark pools, looking perhaps for the trout that lurked at times just beneath its surface. Then he speeded up and concentrated on his driving until at last the land flattened into a sort of moor and he saw in the distance the endless wire fencing that marked the project's boundaries.

Fifteen minutes later he was in the company of the man he'd come to question—a short, bald little German who called himself Hans Suffern. Rand had been taken to one of the vast circular pools around the back of the buildings, and there he found Suffern bent over a maze of dials. "Mr. Rand, from London?" he asked, betraying only the slightest of accents.

"Correct. And you would be Hans Suffern."

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"I would be." The little German smiled slightly and glanced about at the other workers. Nobody was within earshot. "These security things are quite troublesome, really."

"But necessary," Rand observed.

Suffern shrugged. "But necessary."

"Where could we talk?"

"This is fine with me, right here. Look down there! Did you ever see a fully grown *electrophorus electricus,* Mr. Rand?"

"No." Rand stared over the high railing, catching a glimpse of something dark and long and very evil moving through the shadowed waters.

"The actual body of the electric eel—its vital organs—takes up less than twenty per cent of its length. The rest of the fish is mainly a collection of electric cells in special tissue. Its output can knock out a horse at twenty feet, and kill a healthy man on contact."

"You know a lot about electric eels."

"I've learned."

Rand cleared his throat as they stepped back from the pool. "You told them you were with the Prosper Network during the war. Communications, you said."

"That's right. Though it hardly seems to make any difference at this late date. I come, I offer my services, I offer my knowledge, and instead of being welcomed I am subjected to endless security checks. I am still not allowed access to the laboratory itself."

Rand waved a vague hand. "You know the circumstances. This is a top-secret project. Frankly, there are only a few men in the world who possess your knowledge of electric eels, and one of them is believed to be a Russian agent."

"So you come to question me about the Prosper Network?"

"Exactly."

The man turned and stared up at Rand's face, which was still reasonably youthful and unlined. "You know a lot about Prosper? You were perhaps active in the war?"

"I was old enough to enlist three days after the war ended," Rand said, feeling irrationally the old defense mechanism go to work. He'd lived most of his adult life in the midst of men who resented the noncombatant. "But my field is communications. What type of equipment did you have in Prosper?"

Hans Suffern shrugged. "Type three, Mark two. It did the job."

"You transmitted in cipher?"

"Of course."

"What kind?"

"We used number groups after a polyalphabetic substitution. They had their direction finders on us, of course. It was a dangerous business. Today I understand that agents often tape the message in advance, and simply transmit it at a higher speed. Much safer, because you're on the air for a shorter period."

Rand nodded and they started

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strolling. The wind was warm against their faces, sweeping down between the distant hills to find a sort of freedom where the moor stretched out to greet it. Perhaps Hans Suffern had found freedom here too.

They talked of codes and messages for an hour as they walked about, and Rand did not find anything to indicate that Suffern was other than the man he claimed to be. "You understand," he said at last, "there is no one left from Prosper to identify you. We must have some sort of proof."

The little German smiled. "I understand."

"Have you ever been to Brazil?"

"No. Never."

"Not during the war?"

"No." He smiled. "I was quite busy in France at the time."

"Where did you learn so much about electric eels?"

"I studied ichthyology in Berlin before the war, and recently I was employed at an aquarium outside Paris."

Rand knew the part about the aquarium was true. They started back across the moor, and he wondered what he would tell Colonel Nelson. He'd learned nothing at all —except that the man knew a great deal about codes and ciphers. And electric eels.

That evening he phoned Colonel Nelson. "I don't have a thing. The man looks clean, Colonel."

There was a grunt on the phone. "Really?"

Rand recognized the tone of triumph. "You have something?"

"Nothing conclusive. We transmitted a current photograph of Suffern to America by television satellite. A professor there who worked with Schultz says he's almost certain it's the same man."

"All right," Rand said with a sigh. "Tomorrow I'll ask more questions."

He found Suffern back at the eel pool, faced toward the rising sun as he worked the dials on a tank of chemicals. "You're an early riser," Rand said, making conversation.

"I rise when my friends do," he said, gesturing toward the pool.

"You know the nature of the research being conducted here?"

"A bit. As much as they'll allow me to know. It has to do with a method of counteracting the effects of a certain nerve gas now in Russian hands. The eels—"

"You know a great deal," Rand interrupted, deciding to try a bluff. "You know things that could only have been learned in America. And at a camp on the Amazon. You're Schultz, aren't you?"

"Who? Schultz?"

"Let's cut out the games. You were a German agent named Schultz more than twenty years ago. An American has identified your picture. And we have other proof, too."

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The bald little German smiled. "I doubt that."

"Something as conclusive as fingerprints. You knew the Prosper Network was all but destroyed during the war, so you figured no one could come forward to dispute your story. But there is one man, and he works for me back in London. He's the man who sat in a house on the Dover cliffs and took down the coded messages from Prosper. A telegraph operator's sending is as distinctive to an expert as a fingerprint. Even after twenty years he'll be able to tell me if it was really your hand that sent the Prosper messages."

Hans Suffern suddenly looked like a much older man—a man tired of running, perhaps tired of living. And he looked very ill as he gazed into the pool for a moment, gripping the damp railing with his hands. In that instant Rand thought that he might jump in, but instead the old man turned and said quietly, "All right, I admit it. I am Schultz."

Rand didn't smile. Was the man at the end of his road? Was that why the confession had come so easily? Rand murmured, "You're doing the wise thing, admitting it."

"But I'm not a Russian agent—you must believe that!"

"What are you, then? What brought you here?"

The German glanced around. A few others were up with the dawn, and down the line a workman was beginning to check the tanks. "Come into my office, where we can talk."

Rand followed him into a glassed-in cubicle at the back of the building. Schultz, his face gray, sat uncertainly behind the desk and tried to light his pipe with shaking hands. For a moment—just for a moment—Rand felt sorry for him.

"You ask what I am, sir, and I tell you I am a man. Nothing more. Yes, I worked for the Germans. Yes, I was in Brazil and in America. My assignment was to spy on the project and to sabotage it if possible." He held out his hands, palms up. "But that was long ago. A lifetime ago!"

"Then what are you doing here now?"

"The eels. They're my life—what's left of it. I learned many things on that wartime assignment. It's only natural I should try to use that knowledge. I can help the English, just as some of my fellow Germans help the Americans to build their moon rockets."

"You killed those men," Rand said, suddenly tired. This was not the assignment he had anticipated. "What about that?"

"I killed the two in Brazil, and the one in America. But it was wartime then. I was a soldier, just as you might have been. The eel pool on the Amazon was no different from the foxhole on the Rhine. I killed the enemy."

"You were a spy, not a soldier."

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Schultz spread his hands again, putting down the futile pipe. "I wouldn't expect that of you. After all, I was the same as you are now. Aren't you a soldier? How many men have you killed?"

Rand looked away, the distaste growing within him. "I don't kill men."

"Not directly, perhaps. Not with your own hands. But we all do it. Killing is part of the business, part of the war. And our war never ends."

"It ended for you when Germany was defeated."

"Yes, and what could I do? Could I reveal my identity, with three dead men on my record? Could I come home from the war like my brothers in uniform? No, I could only go on with the deception. And that is what brought me to Scotland, Mr. Rand. Not an assignment for the Russians or anybody else, but only the need to make a living before I die—and to be near those creatures in the pool."

Rand looked away, out toward the concrete pools with their strange secrets. "You can hardly expect them to let you remain here."

"Why not? The war has been over a long time. I have scientific knowledge they need."

"You betrayed them once."

"Not at all. I spied on the Americans, but I betrayed no one. I am a man of honor, who only wishes to do some little good in the little time I have left."

Rand got to his feet. He didn't want to talk with this man any longer, because he didn't know the answers to the questions he was being asked. Colonel Nelson and the others could take it from here. "I'll be going now," he said. "I'll tell them what you said. Maybe they'll see it your way."

Then he went out to his car and drove back the way he'd come, across the moor and past the dark pools where the trout waited. No eels, only trout.

Rand didn't have to journey back to London. Colonel Nelson was waiting in the village where Rand had spent the night. Over a beer in the pub Rand told him what had happened.

"Interesting," Nelson said. "Do you believe him?"

"I don't know—I really don't know. I guess I keep thinking about myself and what I'd do if I ever got out of this business. It's not like a soldier taking off his uniform. If a U-2 pilot goes to work for an aircraft manufacturer, or a Double-C man gets a job with a television network, or Schultz goes back to his eels—well, who's to say at what moment the spy retires and something else takes over?"

"At the moment they stop paying him," Colonel Nelson decided.

"No, not at all. An ex-spy might easily want to keep on taking money for nothing, and an unpaid spy might well gather information in

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hopes of a future sale. Payment or nonpayment is no sure measurement of what goes on in a man's mind."

"We don't have to know what goes on in his mind, Rand. He admits being Schultz, to murdering three men. We could order him arrested, or even killed."

"I know," said Rand quietly. "It's an awful decision to make."

"Not so awful, Rand. I make them every day."

"Maybe that's what's so awful. Maybe in Concealed Communications it's different. Maybe I'm in this game for the puzzle and not for the kill."

Colonel Nelson looked up as he rose. "You didn't finish your beer. Where are you going now?"

"Back to Schultz. And back to his eels."

The day was hot, and the road dusty. By the time he reached his destination, Rand was thirsty. This time he found Schultz inside, carefully manipulating the slimy body of an eight-foot eel with his specially insulated gloves.

"Isn't that dangerous?" Rand asked.

"Not at the moment. We've been discharging him for days, and he needs time to recharge. They're amazing creatures."

"I've been thinking about what you said this morning."

"Yes?"

"I don't think there's much chance, Schultz, that they'll let you stay on here."

"No. I suppose not."

"They couldn't take the risk."

"No."

"I'm sorry."

The German bowed his head. "So am I."

Rand stopped for a drink of water, then went back to his car. The little German, looking even older, even more ill, was waiting there for him. "One thing I wanted to ask you, Mr. Rand. That radio operator who contacted Prosper—you made him up?"

"I made him up. But it was an idea. We could have checked on it to make sure."

"You're an intelligent man."

"With puzzles. Not with people."

Rand wheeled the car away and headed back toward the village.

Colonel Nelson found him at supper time. "Our bird just tried to send a message, Rand. A telegram to someone in Paris."

"Let me see it," Rand said.

Colonel Nelson passed him the yellow form. "What do you make of it?"

Rand studied the printed words. *Rudolph: Am nearing decision. Have Ernst Reisch entertain Mother until Sister takes Aunt Clara to town or not. I guarantee his tip.* It was signed *Hans.*

"What do you make of it?" Nelson repeated. "Looks like a code to me."

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"With all those proper names, yes." Rand stared at the paper, then put it down.

"Can you break it?"

"If it's a code, it can't be broken without the key. A cipher is something else again."

"Can you send it to your people in London?"

"I don't need to do that."

"You've got something, Rand? So quickly?"

"These things are my business. It's the simplest sort of secret message, really. Just read the first letter of each word."

"R-a-n-d-h-e-r-e-m-u-s-t-a-c-t-t-o-n-i-g-h-t."

"Rand here. Must act tonight."

Colonel Nelson's eyes hardened. "There's our evidence. He's still a secret agent. I'd better take him out of circulation right away. Coming along?"

Rand shook his head. "No, it's over," he said softly. "I'm going back to London."

"Did you have a good trip?" Rand's secretary asked the next morning, depositing the mail in the center of his desk.

"Yes, Gloria," he answered. "I met a man who likes eels, and I met the eels themselves. What's on for this morning?"

"Colonel Nelson wants to see you. He's on his way down."

"Oh?"

A few moments later the Colonel arrived. "It was a messy business, Rand. You should have come along."

"What happened?"

"I had to kill the fellow. Self-defense. He tried to throw one of those damned eels at me."

"Yes," Rand nodded. "He would have done it that way."

"You sound as if you almost expected him to."

Rand closed his eyes. He was remembering Hans Suffern's face getting older just before he admitted being Schultz, remembering how ill the man looked. "He wanted to jump into the pool and he couldn't," Rand said. "He knew he had only a short time to live—but he didn't have the nerve to jump into the pool."

"You mean he wanted to die?"

"Schultz was a top German agent during the war. And he knew from our talk that I was an expert on ciphers and secret messages. Do you really think he'd be foolish enough to use such a simple cipher when he knew I'd see the message? Do you really think he'd start the message with *Rand*—a name that would mean little or nothing to his Paris contact? He started with my name so I'd be sure to catch the message. He wanted me to read it. That address in Paris doesn't even exist. I checked it late last night."

"But *why?*"

"Because he was probably dying and wanted to spend his last days with his eels. But when I told him it couldn't be, he preferred to die as

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quickly as possible. He didn't have the courage to commit suicide, so he sent that message and 'arranged' to be killed. As simple as that."

Colonel Nelson walked to the window. "Why didn't you tell me this last night?"

"Because I couldn't be absolutely sure, and because we couldn't take even the most remote chance."

He knew that would satisfy Colonel Nelson—and besides, it was true. In this business can anyone ever be absolutely certain, or risk even the most remote chance? But Rand had another reason, which he added silently to himself: after all, it was the least he could do for another member of the profession—even someone on the other side.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

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Stein, Aaron Marc	I FEAR THE GREEKS	Doubleday	3.50	6/17

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Dewey, Thomas B.	A SEASON FOR VIOLENCE	Gold Medal (Orig.)	$ .50	5/31
Ford, Leslie	MURDER IN MARYLAND	*Popular Library*	.60	6/7
MacDonald, John D.	DARKER THAN AMBER	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	5/31
Queen, Ellery	WHO SPIES, WHO KILLS?	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.70	6/21

(Titles and data supplied by the publishers)

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The case was so urgent that it pulled Leyne Requel out of bed in the middle of the night and sent him racing to help a friend in dire trouble. All the evidence, every jot and tittle of it, pointed to Spence Cuttinson as the only possible murderer—including the

DYING MESSAGE

by LEYNE REQUEL

THE SHRILLING OF THE TELEPHONE in a certain Manhattan apartment disturbed the slumbers of three people. It was Jandu, the houseboy, who struggled into wakefulness to answer it, and even he was without his customary cheerfulness as he groped for the offending instrument.

A voice spoke urgently from the other end, but Jandu was firm. No, he could not disturb Mr. Requel. The voice urged some more, and then the phone was taken gently from Jandu by Leyne Requel himself. That gentleman, minus his pince-nez, listened intently, startled wide-awake by what he heard. He reached for pad and pencil, scribbled down an address and directions, and was soon racing into his clothes, heedless of a protesting Jandu. The third sleeper, Requel's father, merely rolled over when the phone rang, and so did not hear the story until later . . .

The sun had just risen over the sleeping village of Scundermere when Leyne drove through at an indecent pace toward the lake. He screeched to a halt by a signpost, consulted his notes, and hurried on as fast as the dirt road permitted. Spying a hunting lodge through the trees, Leyne pulled into the dirt track, jumped from his car, and headed for the door of the lodge.

A State Trooper stopped him, and he was still trying to persuade that doughty individual to let him in when the local Chief of Police, hearing heated voices, came out.

"What is it, Oattes?" he asked.

"Sir," replied Trooper Porter Oattes, young pride of the State Police, "this feller wants to butt in."

Leyne hastened to explain. "I'm Leyne Requel—"

"Say no more," exclaimed the Chief. "I used to work with your old man on the New York police force. I'm Carson Pellicot, and I'm proud to know you. Oattes, this is a good man to have around." To Leyne he said, "C'mon in. I'll fill you in if you like—or do you know all about it?"

"All I know," said Leyne, "is that an old friend called me in the wee hours of the morning and said he'd be arrested for murder if I didn't do

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something pronto. So here I am. I don't know a thing."

"Hmmm," said Pellicot. "Would your friend be Spence Cuttinson, by any chance?" Leyne's expression was all the confirmation he needed, and the Chief went on thoughtfully. "I don't see what you can do. Cuttinson *must* have done this killing. We found his footprints—and only his—where the murder was committed. *And* he was the one who 'found' the body out in the summerhouse, on his way to do some pre-dawn fishing. *He* says. And if that ain't enough, the victim wrote out Cuttinson's initials before he died. Looks to me like that clinches it."

"Who else was here?"

"Only the owner of this place, Kit Heller—he's a theatrical producer—and the man who was killed, Vic Hemitt, a shady lawyer from New York."

"Where are Heller and Spence now?"

"Cuttinson is in the kitchen. Heller took off. I know," Pellicot raised a hand. "It looks suspicious, but Heller left a note saying something important had come up and he'd be back. He could have got a phone call, though no one heard any. But that's not the point. The point is—"

"Hi, Leyne," interrupted a tragic voice from the doorway. Leyne looked and could not believe his eyes. Spence Cuttinson was normally a bouncing individual whose spirit was never dampened. Evidently, however, suspicion of murder had worked a change. Now he was haggard, and even his voice was a hollow mockery.

"The trouble," Spence said wearily, "is that Hemitt seems to have accused me in his last moments. I don't understand it, and I can't explain it."

Leyne was thinking furiously. "How are you so sure," he asked Pellicot, "that some unknown person didn't come along and do it?"

The Chief of Police sighed. "There's a small summerhouse out back, a one-room affair with one door and two windows. The ground around it is so muddy that no one can get near it without leaving prints. Well, we can see where Hemitt went out to it—to the door—but no one else went anywhere near the door. There was one set of tracks up to each window, and I'll swear both sets were made by different pairs of shoes—but *both* pairs belong to your friend."

"The awful thing," Spence cut in, "is that I think so, too. I did make the tracks going up to the window on the side nearest the house. That's when I went for a fishing rod I'd left out there. When I saw the light I went up to the window to see what was going on. I could tell at a glance that Hemitt was dead, and alone, and I could see the bullet hole, so I came back and called the police. I didn't want to go in and touch anything, or walk around out-

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side, for fear of messing up clues. Little did I realize," he concluded wryly, "where the clues I was so careful to preserve were going to point!"

"And," said the Chief, "there's another set of prints going up to the other window, and a spent cartridge on the ground outside. The murderer went up to that window and shot his victim through it, all right, and I'd take my oath he was standing in Cuttinson's shoes at the time. We found that pair by the back door of the lodge, and your friend identifies 'em, but says he wasn't *in* 'em. I've sent casts of the prints, along with the shoes, to the lab, but I don't think there's much question. Your friend's guilty as sin."

Seeing the protest in Leyne's eye, the Chief added, "Yes, Heller's about the same size and weight as Cuttinson, and he *could* have pinched the shoes and worn 'em to divert suspicion. But that don't explain the initials the victim wrote when he was dying."

"Couldn't Heller have gone in through the window and written the initials himself?" asked Leyne.

"No, sir. That window was stuck—open a slit, just enough to poke a gun muzzle through. The other window ain't been opened for years. You can take it from me, it was Hemitt that wrote *SC*."

Leyne's silver eyes narrowed. "Let's try another tack. What was the connection between these people, and why would someone want to kill Hermitt?"

"Blackmail," Pellicot answered promptly.

"Oh, come," Leyne exclaimed. "Don't ask me to believe that Cuttinson has a guilty secret, too! Spence, old pal, what have you been up to? What are you doing with this crowd, anyhow?"

"That's simple enough," replied Cuttinson. "I know Heller only slightly, but I have a client who's making a deal with him to back a show he's planning to produce. Hemitt was Heller's lawyer, and he asked us both to come up here and work out some of the details of the contract. I thought I'd get in some fishing, too. Hah!

"But I'll tell you this. If I didn't know that Hemitt wrote my initials after he was shot—and he *couldn't* have thought it was I outside the window; there's no earthly reason—I'd say now that Heller set up this whole week-end to frame me for the killing. Since the motive's supposed to be blackmail, it wouldn't prove anything if they can't show a connection between me and the dead man."

"Not much doubt about the blackmail," Pellicot said. "Hemitt's room was searched, but I mean thoroughly, by someone looking for something. We've searched, too, and didn't find anything, so I guess Cut—the murderer found what he was looking for."

"Right," said Leyne. "But Hemitt

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could just as easily have been blackmailing Heller, who could have searched the room while Spence was asleep.

"Spence has a spotless reputation," Leyne went on. "I've never known him to say or do anything dishonest. Therefore, I'm going on the premise that he didn't do this and is telling the truth. That means there's another explanation for those initials—there must be."

He hoisted his lean frame out of the chair. "Well," he said, with more cheerfulness than he felt, "I'd like to have a look at those confounded initials."

Chief Pellicot accompanied him, leaving Oattes in charge. The two men made their way to the summerhouse, a small structure a few hundred yards from the lodge.

On the way Leyne inspected the footprints, now added to by the boots of the State Police. They told precisely the story he had heard.

The summerhouse still contained the unpleasant spectacle of the dead man. He might have been an unprepossessing figure in life, but in death he was pitiful. Slumped in a chair that had been drawn up to the table, his body faced the slightly open window away from the house, his head twisted toward the other window, so that the bullet hole in the forehead was clearly visible from the spot where Spence said he had discovered the crime.

Hemitt had apparently spent his last moments before the shooting without any suspicion of danger. He had come out to the summerhouse equipped with a crossword puzzle, which he was about two-thirds through, and at the side of the table was a book. It seemed more than likely that he had made an appointment to meet someone out here, and had provided himself with amusements until the other person should appear.

The pencil with which Hemitt had been doing the puzzle had dropped to the floor, but what he had written last was not part of the crossword. A large *SC* had been irregularly scrawled across the diagram, and it certainly looked like the shaky writing of a dying man.

"Well, Mr. Requel," asked the Chief, "what do you think?"

"I admit it *looks* incriminating," agreed Leyne, "and the meeting in the summerhouse implies a certain secrecy. But logic dictates that there must be another explanation for the *SC*. Hemitt must have had a good idea of who might murder him—the person he had an appointment with—but my conclusion is that he tried to leave a clue that would escape the murderer's notice, or that the murderer wouldn't understand."

They were interrupted by some State Troopers who had come to remove the body. One of the Troopers had two reports to make. First, the lab had declared positively that the shoes and the footprints matched; second, the New York police (in the person of none other than Steve

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Geileran—Leyne's father's right-hand man), stated that Vic Hemitt was a known blackmailer.

"Look, Mr. Requel," Chief Pellicot said, not without reluctance, "I've got to arrest your friend unless you can give me some other reason for those initials."

"Let me have an hour," Leyne urged. "One hour more or less won't matter."

Pellicot agreed, and they walked to the door. Leyne spotted two men hanging about behind the trees. He jerked his head toward them, eyebrows raised in question. Pellicot said, "Names are Ferdinand Arcey and Dean F. Belmer. They ain't suspects—we know where they were all last night—but they're involved some way. I can't make out how, and they won't say a word, but I'm sure they're partners in crime."

With this Pellicot departed, while Leyne settled himself in the summerhouse for a siege of concentrated thinking. He sat at the table, his chin propped on his hand. Absently he nibbled his knuckle. The minutes ticked by.

He glanced idly at the part of the crossword with which Hemitt had evidently spent his last moments on earth. A six-letter horizontal word meaning "weapon" appeared to be the last word filled in. Vertically, the definition—numbered *50*—was "a set of implements or tools," in three letters.

Leyne shook his head and examined the book. It was called *SCENES OF INDIA,* and his eyebrows rose. The title began with *SC.* Hemitt might have meant to write more before he died. Leyne inspected the book minutely, but he found nothing helpful.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. How blind he had been!

He hurried back to the lodge. Spence Cuttinson looked up with a ghost of hope in his eyes, the Chief with curiosity and skepticism.

"Pellicot," Leyne asked triumphantly, "what's a three-letter word meaning 'a set of implements or tools'?"

A look crossed the old Chief's face that has crossed the faces of other men who do not know Leyne Requel well. Cuttinson managed to say in a strangled voice, "Do you mean 'kit'?"

Leyne beamed. "Exactly! Isn't that the first name of our elusive host, Kit Heller? It's also the crossword clue Vic Hemitt was working on when the murderer cut his puzzling short. *And it's number fifty down!*

"You still don't see? If a dying man tried to write *50,* but scrawled it so shakily that it trailed off before he finished, it might well look like *SC.*

"And, you know," Leyne concluded with a smile, "it just had to be Kit Heller."

"What do you mean?" asked Cuttinson.

"Why, Kit Heller is the perfect name for the killer."

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CHALLENGE TO THE READER

An old proverb, elaborated on by Plutarch and Thucydides, tells us that history repeats itself. A true variation—thus giving us a new proverb—is that mystery repeats itself. So here is Mrs. Norma Schier (to use her real name again) pulling the wool over our eyes for the fourth time.

In the August 1965 issue of *EQMM,* Mrs. Schier, under the author's name of Norma Haigs, presented us with a story titled *If Hangman Treads;* and the entire story, including the title, the author's name, and every proper name in the story itself, was an anagrammatic pastiche of Ngaio Marsh's Roderick Alleyn stories.

In the November 1965 issue of *EQMM,* Mrs. Schier, under the anagrammatic disguise of Cathie Haig Star, offered us *The Teccomeshire Mystery,* a wholesale pastiche-parody of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot stories—and again every proper name in the story was a telltale anagram.

Then in the April 1966 issue of *EQMM* came *Hocus-Pocus at Drumis Tree,* signed as by Handon C. Jorricks—this time a grand-scale anagrammatic pastiche of John Dickson Carr's Sir Henry Merrivale (H.M.) stories.

And now, number four—

Leyne Requel=Ellery Queen

and if "the killer" and "Kit Heller" (perfect name for "the killer" indeed!) is the only anagram that Leyne Requel himself spotted, the great detective is indeed slipping. Once again all the proper names in the story are anagrams—but, of course, you knew that all along, didn't you? For examples:

Scundermere=murder scene
Porter Oattes=State Trooper
Carson Pellicot=local Inspector
Spence Cuttinson=innocent suspect
Vic Hemitt=the victim
Jandu=Djuna
Steve Geileran=Sergeant Velie

There were other clues too—a plenitude of giveaways. This addendum is headed CHALLENGE TO THE READER—a phrase coined by Ellery Queen, and a hallmark of both E.Q. the

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author and E.Q. the detective. The title of the story, *Dying Message,* is a creative approach which, if not invented by Ellery Queen, certainly has become one of Queen's trademarks, and is more associated with E.Q. than with any other mystery writer. And the use of the same name for both the author and the detective also points inescapably to Ellery Queen, the only modern mystery writer who uses this double device.

And still that is not all. Mrs. Schier has added a bonus of two clues—which, if you unscrambled them, earn you a special commendation. Remember those two silent, skulking characters in the story revealingly called "partners in crime"? —Ferdinand Arcey and Dean F. Belmer. Anagrams again, and two red herrings standing for the two creators of Ellery Queen—Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee to whom, in Mrs. Schier's own words, she "is enormously indebted; they have won my undying gratitude for reading pleasure these many years, to say nothing of my gratitude as an author for their wonderful editorial help and encouragement."

F.D., M.B.L., and E.Q. are equally grateful to *you,* Mrs. S.—and who will be the next in your anatomy of anonyms and anagrams?

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Q. B. I.: QUEEN'S BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

. . . in which Ellery looks for the head man of the rackets

CRIME SYNDICATE DEPT.: *Payoff*

by ELLERY QUEEN

"COSA NOSTRA?" ELLERY ASKED, sitting up.

"No," sighed Inspector Queen, "these operators are about as close to the Cosa Nostra type as the stratosphere to a groundhog. And as hard to reach. It's a real high-class nastiness."

"Tell me more, Dad."

"Well, we were up against a stone wall till evidence turned up that this plush-lined mob has a Board of Directors composed of four men. When I tell you who they are you'll send for the loony wagon."

The Inspector raised his corded hands and began to tick the quartet off. "One: Ever hear of DeWitt Hughes?"

"Certainly I've heard of DeWitt Hughes. Wall Street and banking in the megamillions. You're not seriously suggesting. . . ?"

"I am."

"But DeWitt Hughes? Directing a crime syndicate?"

"As one of four," said his father, shaking his head. "Of whom the second is John T. Ewing."

Ellery gawped. "The oil and mining tycoon?"

"You heard me. And Number Three: Filippo Falcone."

"The construction and trucking king? Dad, is this a rib?"

"I wish I could joke about it," the Inspector said. "And last—you ready, son? Reilly Burke."

"You've got to be kidding," Ellery exclaimed. "Burke, the Great Mouthpiece of our time! Why would a lawyer of Burke's standing and big businessmen like Falcone, Ewing, and Hughes dirty themselves in the rackets?"

The old man shrugged. "Maybe it's so easy for such operators to make big money legit these days that the only kicks left is to turn crooked."

"I'd like to help straighten them out," Ellery said grimly. "I take it I fit into your plans some way?"

"Before we move a step I want to know which of those four cuties is top banana, Ellery. Not only would that enable us to move in faster and so cut down on the chances of a tipoff, but my information is that

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the head man has possession of the main syndicate records. So I'm hoping you can pinpoint him for us."

"Do you have a lead?"

"In a way." Inspector Queen flipped his intercom. "Velie, send in Mrs. Prince."

The ravaged woman Sergeant Velie admitted to the Inspector's office must once have been pretty in a petite, even chic, way. But only wreckage was left. She was so nervous that Ellery had to help her into the chair; her arm thrummed like a piano wire.

"Mrs. Prince's husband is an accountant who's serving five to ten for an embezzlement," Inspector Queen said.

"He didn't do it." She had a broken-down voice, too. "He confessed to a crime he didn't commit because it was part of a deal."

"Tell my son what Mr. Prince told you when he was sent up."

"John said that when he got out we'd be set for life," the woman told Ellery. "Meanwhile, every month for over three years now I've received through the mail an unmarked envelope containing $750 in small bills. That's what the children and I have been living on."

"You don't know where the money is coming from?"

"No, and John won't discuss it when I visit him. But he knows, all right! It's part of the deal he made, I'm positive, to make sure he keeps his mouth shut."

"He's being released from Sing Sing on parole tomorrow, Ellery."

"My husband told me not to meet him in Ossining—to wait for him at home," the woman whispered. "Mr. Queen, I'm scared."

"Why?"

"Because of the deal he made, whatever it was. Of the blood money, wherever it comes from, that he's going to be paid off with. I don't want it!" Mrs. Prince cried. "All I want is for us to get away from here, change our name, start all over again somewhere. But John won't listen to me. . . ."

"Or to anyone else," said Inspector Queen. "It's a long shot, Ellery, but maybe he'll listen to you. Mrs. Prince says he's always been a fan of yours."

"If you'd only make John see that we can't build a life on that kind of money, Mr. Queen!"

"Nobody, including you, is going to talk Prince out of *that,*" the Inspector remarked to his son, when the woman had left, "in spite of what I just said. Not when he's earned the money by sacrificing his good name and over three years of his life."

"Then what's the point, Dad? And what does it have to do with the crime syndicate you're investigating?"

"We've found out," his father answered, "that before Prince was sent up he handled a lot of highly confidential work for Hughes, Ewing, Burke, and Falcone; in fact, the embezzlement rap stemmed

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from a job he did for one of Hughes' banks. He's denied it, but I have good reason to believe Prince was close to the big boys and knows who the head man is. Maybe you can think of a way to trick the information out of him."

"And he's coming home tomorrow?" Ellery looked thoughtful. "All right, Dad. Let's form a reception committee."

At 2:15 p.m. the following day the reception committee turned out to have a noisy, and unexpected, partner.

The Inspector's men were routinely staked out in various vestibules and tradesmen's entrances in the vicinity of the modest, East Side, corner apartment building where the Princes lived. A taxi turned into the street and pulled up before the building. John Prince got out. The cab drove off, and the emaciated, rather stooped figure of the accountant turned toward the building.

At that instant a nondescript black sedan with muddied license plates careened around the corner and began to chatter and spit fire as it bolted past Prince and up the street and around the corner. Prince fell to the sidewalk, staining it red as he hit.

Squad cars roared futilely off after the vanished murder car as the Queens and Sergeant Velie ran over to the quiet man. They were almost, not quite, too late.

Sergeant Velie took one look and advised, "Better step on it."

"Prince. Prince, listen," Ellery said, stooping over him. "Help us get them. Talk. Can you talk?"

"Four . . . of them," gasped the dying man, looking into Ellery's eyes. "Each one uses . . . a code name . . . of a city."

"Four cities?"

"Boston . . . Philadelphia . . . Berkeley. . . ." The voice guttered like a burned-out candle. Prince made one incredible effort. "And Houston," he said, quite clearly.

"Which one is top man?"

But the accountant's stare glassed over and remained that way.

"Bye-bye, blackbird," announced Sergeant Velie.

"So my hunch was right," muttered Inspector Queen. "He did know. One second—one second more!—and he'd have told us. No, Velie, let her," he said in a gentler tone. "Mrs. Prince, I'm sorry. . . ." The old man sounded sorry for a number of things.

The widow stood over her husband's body. "Now you know, John," she said to it. "Now you know how they meant to set you up." And she brushed by the Inspector's proffered arm and went blindly back into the apartment building.

"Well?" the Inspector snapped to his son after a while. "Don't stand there with your mouth hanging open! This code business ought to be your candy; each of the four us-

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ing the name of a city for identification! What did he say they were again?"

"Boston, Philadelphia, Berkeley, Houston." Ellery was still returning the dead man's stare. Then he turned aside and said, "For the love of heaven, Velie, close his eyes, will you?"

"Well, it doesn't matter. We knew who they are," and the Inspector turned away, too. "The only thing we didn't know—the name of the head man—he didn't get to tell us."

"Oh," said Ellery, "but he did."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER

Which of the four is head man in the syndicate? And how did Ellery know?

Ellery's solution: "If you examine them, there's a connection between the names of the crime directorate and the city code names they chose to cover their identities.

"Take one: Reilly *Burke* and the city of *Berk*eley. Burke—Berk. Identical in sound.

"Or take *Fil*ippo Falcone and *Phil*adelphia. Fil—Phil."

"Oh, come on, Ellery," said Inspector Queen. "Coincidence."

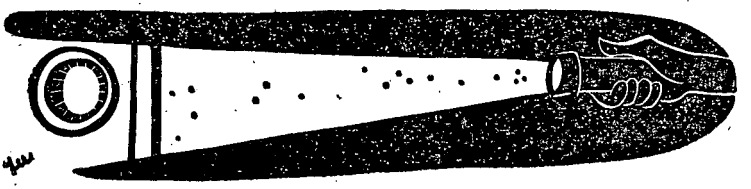
"Then how about DeWitt *Hughes* and *Hous*ton? Hughes—Hous. Two might be a coincidence. Three? No, sir."

"But that leaves John T. Ewing and the code name of Boston. Find me a connection between those two!"

"Ah, that's the missing ingredient," Ellery said, watching the meat wagoneers trundling their poor freight away. "In each city name the corresponding clue was in the first syllable: Berk, Phil, Hous. Try it on Boston."

"Boston. Bos." The Inspector looked doubtful. Then he cried. *"Boss!"*

"Ewing is obviously the head man you're trying to identify," Ellery nodded. "The Boss."



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a new story by

THOMAS B. DEWEY

Lucien's Nose

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: THOMAS B. DEWEY

TITLE: *Lucien's Nose*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The maitre d' was a conscientious and dedicated employee. He believed in service, and he knew what was good—and bad—for the hotel . . .*

LUCIEN FONTAINE, MAÎTRE D'HÔTEL of the Trade Winds Resort, had a taste for intricate seasonings, an eye for a beautiful woman, and a nose for trouble. The nose was long and noticeably hooked over a casual mustache, which twitched now as he stood on the dining terrace and watched his late-luncheon guests departing.

Particularly he watched the woman in beige, the elegant one with the loosely gathered hair framing her classical face, her dark lustrous eyes brimming with infinite promise—and despair.

Lucien riffled through a clutch of luncheon tabs, scanned one at some length, then marched across the terrace and disappeared in the service corridor.

In the cramped lair of the hotel's security officer, he made a blunt announcement: "The lady in six ten plans to do away with herself."

George Reamy had been at his trade long enough to accept with tolerance the ravings of the more volatile help. To anyone less sophisticated than Lucien, the beaming serenity in George's pale eyes would have been as shattering as the condescending tone of his somewhat scratchy voice.

"What makes you think so?"

"My nose," Lucien said, "and the hairs on the back of my head."

George nodded carefully.

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"Why tell me?" he asked.

"You are the hotel detective, *n'est ce pas*? You are in charge of the Violence and Disorderly Conduct Department?"

"I guess so," George said. "What do you think I ought to do?"

"You ought to prevent such a tragic thing from coming to pass."

George sighed and rubbed his eyes.

"All right," he said, "I'll knock on her door and ask her not to do away with herself."

But Lucien, who could anticipate the rejection of an idea as promptly as an impending complaint over the texture of a steak, was already leaving the house detective's office.

Cary Southern, M.D., was filling in for the regular house physician, who was on sick leave. Dr. Southern's medical qualifications were impeccable, but he was a young man, with little experience in the mystique of hotel operation. His reaction to Lucien's announcement was less tolerant than George Reamy's.

"I am not a psychiatrist," he said. "I am an internist. In the last twelve hours I have treated five severe sunburns, two strep throats, one broken ankle, one case of diabetic coma, two cases of food poisoning, three —"

"What do you say?"

Lucien's mustache vibrated. His breath erupted in a series of minute explosions.

"*Food* poisoning—?"

"Relax," Dr. Southern said. "They're not serious—rarely are. Nothing wrong with the food—individual reactions, other factors. All I'm saying is, I've been busy, and there is nothing I can do about your woman in six ten."

Still breathing with difficulty, Lucien implored, "Who then? Who can do something?"

Possibly because he was young and felt himself beset by unfamiliar forces, Dr. Southern fell back on cynicism.

"What is it to you?" he asked.

Lucien drew himself up, assumed his usual dignity and self-assurance.

"It would be bad for the hotel," he said.

The doctor nodded.

"If your friend comes down with flu, or a stomachache, or starts bleeding at the nose—call me," he said. "Meanwhile, you might take it up with the manager."

"Thank you," Lucien said stiffly. "Thank you very much."

On the beach the woman from Room 610—whose name by marriage was Laura Fitzgerald—lay motionless on her back and stared at the blue sky through dark sunglasses. At short intervals she read, by after-image, superimposed on the sky, the sign posted at the high edge of the beach.

HOTEL GUESTS ONLY

No Lifeguard After Six P.M.

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After six, she thought. After dark, in the warm black water—the way the sky is black, even now, even if I take off the glasses—all black, now and forever . . .

It doesn't take long—a minute or two. They say it doesn't hurt actually—only a minute or two—and then sleep, sleep—eternal, black sleep . . .

Dressed for the evening, Lucien paced the confines of his station like a caged bear. His eyes scanned dining room and terrace with the tireless precision of radar screens. By 7:20 a fine film of sweat laced his mustache. He barked at a busboy, who scurried into the kitchen and remained there.

Lucien was turning his station over to the captain when he overheard the room service clerk say, "I'll send a waiter right away. Six ten, that is? Thank you."

"I'll take it myself," Lucien said, snatching the clerk's penciled note.

The room service clerk shrugged at the captain, who shrugged in return.

The woman in Room 610 still wore her beach outfit. She had not attended to her coiffeur or makeup. Two bright spots of color flared high on her cheeks.

"I didn't expect the *maître d'hôtel* in person," she said.

She held the large menu in both hands and gazed at it blankly. After a moment she moved away, letting it fall to the floor.

"I guess I'm not hungry after all," she said.

"Madame must eat a little something," Lucien urged. "The sun on the beach is enervating. When you see and smell the dish—" Stooping, he retrieved the menu. "May I suggest, madame?"

"Yes, please. I ought to eat."

"Something light—a salad perhaps?"

"That will be fine."

"A cold soup to begin—the madrilene?"

"Yes."

"And coffee, madame?"

She nodded and thrust her hands into the pockets of her beach jacket.

"Thank you, monsieur—I'm so sorry—"

"Fontaine, madame. Lucien Fontaine, at your service. I will myself prepare the dressing for the salad, my own recipe."

"I am honored," she said gravely.

In the bustling kitchen the salad chef watched Lucien from a distance, curious and disapproving. Lucien rummaged furiously among jars of oil and cans of seasoning. Mixing, tasting, sniffing, he paused now and then in thought.

The salad chef moved closer, peering. Lucien grumbled at him and turned to screen his movements. The salad chef grimaced.

At length Lucien stood back, snapped his fingers for a waiter.

"The lady in six ten," Lucien

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said. "Stay a while—see that she eats."

The waiter nodded and pushed off with the service cart.

At 9:15 Lucien received an urgent summons from the house physician. Somewhat strained for composure, Dr. Southern apologized for having shrugged off Lucien's earlier warning.

"I beg your pardon?" Lucien said.

"The woman in six ten—violently ill—half an hour ago. I have her in the hospital in the village. We suspect she may have tried to poison herself."

Lucien's face showed an expression of shock.

"You have notified someone?" he said. "Her family—someone to come for her?"

"Yes, of course." The doctor brushed the suggestion aside as a foregone conclusion. "I thought you might—could you check back on what she had for dinner? There was a tray in her room."

Lucien's eyebrows danced high.

"But naturally!" he said. "I took her order myself. A light meal. Salad—crab, I think—"

Dr. Southern nodded wisely.

"Sea food," he muttered. "Very possible—an allergy."

He reached for the telephone, began to dial. Lucien moved his hands.

"A special dressing," he said, "I prepared it personally, myself. Possibly it was too rich for her—"

The doctor hung up.

"You—" he said.

Lucien shrugged.

"This way," he said, "it is perhaps—"

The doctor held up his hand, palm out.

"Better for the hotel," he said.

"Better than to die," Lucien said.

The *maître d'hôtel* let himself out and walked briskly away toward the service corridor.

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Another in William Brittain's bright and entertaining series about "The Man Who"—except in this instance it's "The Woman Who" . . . and Gertrude does her famous fiction hero right proud . . .

THE WOMAN WHO READ REX STOUT

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

THE FIRST TIME I SAW GERTRUDE Jellison reading a Rex Stout detective novel, I laughed so hard it made me weak inside. She didn't pay any attention to me, though. She just sat there on the platform with her nose buried in that book. It was called *Over My Dead Body,* and the jacket had a picture of this big fat guy, Nero Wolfe, scowling as if he had stomach trouble. I'd look at Gert; then I'd look at the book jacket again. That combination would break up anybody.

You see, Gert Jellison weighs over 500 pounds.

Gert and I both work in a Ten-in-One, a carnival side show. My name's Robert Kirby. I'm Gert's partner, which means I stand beside her on the platform during the shows. A pretty easy way to make a living, but I'm not strong enough to do much else. I got the job because, although I'm as tall as Gert, I only tip the scales at 75 pounds. Fat lady, thin man. Get it?

To return to the Nero Wolfe books, Mel Bentner got up the idea. Mel owns the show, and he's our magician and spieler. He stands out in front and tells everybody about the wonderful sights inside the tent. Then, when he's turned the tip and everybody is inside, he comes in and does his act. Mel saw the Nero Wolfe book with the picture on the jacket in a store and thought it would be a good gimmick to have Gert reading it during the show.

After Gert finished that first story, she read her way right through all of Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe books, starting with the earliest one, *Fer-de-Lance.* And pretty soon she began to act like Nero Wolfe. Wolfe liked beer; Gert developed a yen for pink lemonade. Wolfe raised orchids; Gert got her tent so full of carnations she hardly had room to sit down. She took those mysteries seriously, all right. It didn't surprise me much. Gert's serious about all her reading. For all her weight she's really got a sharp mind. She told me she was once up for a job teaching psychology in a college, but the first time those profs got a look at her, they started laughing so much she ran

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away and joined the carney the same day.

As I say, we all thought it was pretty funny to see Gert reading those books about that fat detective. But then Lili was murdered. I didn't laugh at Gert after that.

We should have known something was going to happen. First, one of our trucks broke down, so the Ten-in-One had to stay behind while the rest of the carnival headed for the next set-up. While Mel was trying to fix the truck, he burned his hand on a soldering iron and had to put salve and a big bandage on it. That meant his magic act was out of the show for at least a week.

Well, they say misfortune comes in threes. The third thing was what happened to Lili.

Lili was our snake charmer. She came on the lot one day last season and asked for a job. Just for a joke, Mel told her to feed the snakes that our last charmer had left when she took off with a whole night's receipts. We all waited for Lili to start screaming, but she handled those snakes like so much garden hose. Within two weeks she had her act ready, Gert had made her a costume, and Ferdinand Hanig, our strongman, was in love with her. Ferdie had competition, though. Zeno, the sword swallower, thought Lili was pretty nice, too.

But Gert kept both men at a distance. She mothered Lili, sewed clothes for her, and made sure she got to bed on time. She even let Lili water her carnations when nobody else in the carney was even allowed to sniff one. And both Ferdie and Zeno knew that if they tried any hanky-panky, Gert would clobber either one or both of them. I guess Lili became the daughter that Gert would never have of her own.

Mel was the one who found Lili's body, but I guess we all got to her trailer pretty fast when he started yelling. All but Gert, that is. Gert was just too heavy to walk that far. It's all she can do to waddle from her living tent up onto the bally platform. So I knew it was up to me to tell her what happened. That's another thing about Gert—she gets me to do her errands for her. She says she got the idea from Nero Wolfe, too—something about a guy named "Archie."

I went into her tent while the rest were still over by the trailer. She looked up at me slowly and poured herself another glass of lemonade. "What's all that caterwauling outside?" she grumbled. "It spoiled my beauty sleep."

I knew how she felt about Lili, but I didn't see any way to break the news gently. "It's Lili," I said. "She's dead."

"Dead? Pfui! I saw her just an hour or so ago. She was waving to the rest of the carney when it departed."

"Gert, she's been—somebody killed her."

She just sat there staring at me

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with her mouth open. Then it hit her. I hope I never see anything ever again like that great fat woman wearing a big lacy pink dress, sitting there and crying. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed, shaking all over.

At last she looked up at me. Her expression wasn't sad any more; it was angry. It was the same look Nero Wolfe had on the cover of that book.

"How was she killed, Bob?" she asked finally.

"Strangled. Somebody took a scarf—one of hers, probably—and tied it around her neck. Then he put a tent stake through the loop of the scarf and twisted. I'm glad you didn't have to see her face, Gert. It was terrible."

"Garroted," she said. "What kind of person would choose that way to kill?"

"Whoever it was must have knocked her out first," I continued. "Mel says her head was bruised, and there was blood in her hair."

"Does anyone have an idea who did it?"

"Mel's still over at the trailer looking around. He told me to come over and tell you. I don't know if he found anything."

"I did." The tent flap behind me opened, and Mel came in. "This was under Lili's body." He held out his hand.

Gert and I both looked at the object in Mel's palm. It was a flat piece of metal about two inches long. It was almost semicircular in shape, except that the edge which normally would have been straight had a series of notches in it.

"It looks like a piece of that slum jewelry the old man with the ring-toss concession used for prizes last year," said Gert. "He gave me one before he left the carney."

"Yeah," I said, "but that doesn't prove anything. I used to have one, too. He gave 'em to just about everybody who was working with the show then."

"I don't remember seeing one before," said Mel.

"This is just half of it," said Gert. "When both halves are fitted together, it forms a complete circle. He engraved a name on each half, and the boy got one and gave the other to his girl."

Mel smiled wryly. I figured he was just trying to take Gert's mind off Lili. "Whose name did you have him put on the other half of yours?" he asked her.

"Don't be facetious at a time like this, Mel," she said. "He put my name right across both halves, if you must know. Is there anything special about this medallion?"

"Just that it proves whoever killed Lili must have been nuts. Look."

He flipped the metal plate over in his hand. On the polished surface were engraved four letters, two above and two below.

BY
BY

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"What kind of a screwball would murder a girl like Lili and leave a message like that?" I asked.

Gert took the medallion into that huge palm of hers and looked at it for quite a while. "Whatever happened to that ring-toss man, Mel?" she asked. "Is he still around?"

"No, he's with an outfit down south somewhere. I hear from him occasionally."

Gert dropped the medallion onto her dressing table among some of the carnation pots and slid farther down into her reinforced chair. She closed her eyes, and pretty soon her lips started working—pushing out, drawing back, and pushing out again. We knew her brain was busy, and finally she turned her head slowly to look at us.

"Mel, have you called the police?" she asked.

"No, but I'm on my way right now."

"I don't want you to tell them yet."

"I've got to, Gert," Mel said. "This is murder."

"No! Trust me, Mel. I want to see the murderer apprehended probably more than anyone else on this lot. But he's mine, Mel. I want the person who did this to know that I caught him."

"Oh, Gert, you've been reading too many of those Nero Wolfe stories."

"I've never been one to ask a favor," said Gert. "But now I ask this. Just have everybody here in my tent in an hour. At that time I will prove to your satisfaction who murdered Lili."

Mel thought about it; then he scratched his head. "I believe you will, Gert," he said. "Okay, I'll do it."

He turned to me. "Come on, Skinny. Let's round up the others." He walked out of the tent.

I watched him go and then banged my fist on the table, nearly mashing one of Gert's flowers. "Why does he keep saying that, Gert?" I shouted. "He knows I can't stand that name!"

She laid her hand on my arm heavily. "Easy, Bobby," she said. "He's just as jumpy as the rest of us. He probably forgot."

"He didn't forget. He knows I hate anyone calling me that." I took a few deep breaths to calm down and then went outside, leaving Gert sipping at her everlasting pink lemonade.

It took us a little more than an hour to get everybody in the show together. Cal Lynn, our Flatbush-born Swami, had taken his car into town to get a part for the truck, and Sammy Marsh had gone with him to buy some cotton wads for his fire-eating act. Finally, though, we got everybody crowded inside Gert's tent. Nobody thought she'd really be able to find who had killed Lili, but we figured she deserved the chance.

She looked up at us from her chair with that angry, grouchy ex-

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pression still on her face. "Gentlemen," she said, "a member of our company has been murdered. I ask you to indulge me for a few moments, during which time I will attempt to ascertain the identity of the murderer.

"I am going on the assumption," she continued, "that the murderer is one of us. Lili was alive when the rest of the carney left early this morning. Since that time nobody has been on this lot with the exception of ourselves. Ergo, one of us killed Lili."

We all turned to look at Ferdie and Zeno who were standing off to one side. Gert held up her hand.

"Suspicion without proof is pointless," she said. "But I intend to provide that proof. First, consider the method of murder—a scarf, twisted tightly with a tent stake. But, we must ask ourselves, why was a stake used as a lever? Surely this would indicate that for some reason the murderer, unlike most of us here, was incapable of strangling Lili without mechanical help."

Now there was an eye opener. Maybe Gert was getting something out of those Nero Wolfe books after all! There was a murmuring of voices, and everybody turned toward Mel Bentner who was trying to hide his bandaged hand behind him.

"Wait just a minute!" said Mel. "Maybe the murderer used the lever in order to kill Lili more slowly and make her suffer more."

"I must reject your hypothesis, Mel," said Gert. "You said that Lili was struck on the head before being strangled. Therefore the killer was strangling an unconscious girl."

"But what about that medallion? Why would anybody leave a crazy thing like that near the body?"

"Leave it? Pfui! Are you asking me to believe that the killer had jewelry specially engraved for the occasion?"

It did sound ridiculous the way Gert put it.

"Well, how did it get there, then?" Mel asked.

"The murderer dropped it accidentally, of course."

"Accidentally? You mean the killer just happened to be carrying a piece of jewelry that said BY-BY on it?"

"I think so, yes. Have you stopped to consider what was written on the *other* half of that medallion?"

Mel looked puzzled, but Gert went on. "It is my belief that the triangle of Lili, Ferdinand, and Zeno recently became a quadrangle. This morning the fourth person had a rendezvous with Lili and offered her his love—and Lili rejected him. She probably did so in such a way that he became furious and hit her, perhaps with the same stake he used to tighten the scarf. Then, fearing that Lili would tell what he had done, he killed her to keep her quiet."

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Ferdie Hanig lumbered up in front of Gert. "Who did it?" he asked menacingly.

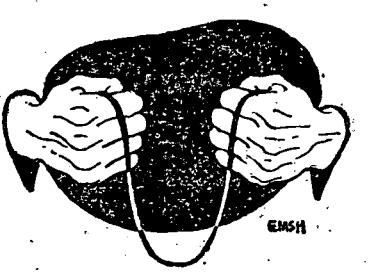
"Who is the person in this show who would find it impossible to use a scarf as a strangling cord without increasing his strength through leverage?" Gert asked. "Who takes umbrage at a simple remark which others would consider a joke? And finally, who has a name which, in its diminutive form, could be written across both halves of a piece of jewelry in such a way that the right half would contain only the letters BY BY?"

So that's all. They found it all happened just the way Gert said. Everything would have been okay if only Lili hadn't called me "Skinny." Or if Gert hadn't spent so much time reading those Rex Stout mysteries.

Just for the record, the policeman in charge of the case has asked me to put my name at the bottom of this page in a kind of special way. He says it'll help them, and that it's better for me to cooperate.

I hereby acknowledge that the above confession was freely given, without coercion, and that I have been offered no promise or inducement of any kind in order to make it.

(signed)
BOB-BY
KIR-BY



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complete NERO WOLFE short novel by

REX STOUT

Like so many of Nero Wolfe's cases, this one looked simple and ordinary; but like so many of Nero Wolfe's cases, it proved anything but—before you could say Archie Goodwin, the case became complicated and extraordinary. And like all of Nero Wolfe's cases, it parades a fascinating cast of characters: Harry Koven, the curiously indecisive creator of Dazzle Dan, famous comic strip hero; his much younger wife; a strange little man called Squirt; Koven's Girl Friday, his agent and business manager; the two artists who actually drew Dazzle Dan; and last but definitely not least, a tropical monkey called Rookaloo.

Near the end of this short novel, and just before the denouement, Archie thinks that Nero Wolfe's efforts are "far from one of his best performances"—in a case "where nothing less than his best would do." Well, Archie has eaten his words before: Nero Wolfe triumphs again!

THE DAZZLE DAN MURDER CASE

by REX STOUT

I WAS DOING TWO THINGS AT ONCE. With my hands I was getting my armpit holster and the Marley .32 from a drawer of my desk, and with my tongue I was giving Nero Wolfe a lecture on economics.

"The most you can hope to soak him," I stated, "is five hundred bucks. Deduct a C for overhead and another C for expenses incurred, that leaves three hundred. Eighty-five per cent for income tax will leave you with forty-five bucks clear for the wear and tear on your brain and my legs, not to mention the risk. That wouldn't buy—"

"Risk of what?" He muttered that only to be courteous, to show that he had heard what I said, though actually he wasn't listening. Seated behind his desk, he was scowling, not at me but at the crossword puzzle in the London *Times*.

"Complications," I said darkly. "You heard him explain it. Playing games with a gun is sappy." I was contorted, buckling the strap of the holster. That done, I picked up my

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coat. "Since you're listed in the red book as a detective, and since I draw pay, such as it is, as your licensed assistant, I'm all for detecting for people on request. But this bozo wants to do it himself, using our firearm as a prop. We might just as well send it up to him by messenger."

"Pfui," Wolfe muttered. "It is a thoroughly conventional proceeding. You are merely out of humor because you don't like Dazzle Dan. If it were Pleistocene Polly you would be zealous."

"Nuts. I look at the comics occasionally just to be cultured. It wouldn't hurt any if you did."

I went to the hall for my things, let myself out, descended the stoop, and headed toward Tenth Avenue for a taxi. A cold gusty wind came at my back from across the Hudson, and I made it brisk, swinging my arms, to get my blood going.

It was true that I did not care for Dazzle Dan, the hero of the comic strip that was syndicated to two thousand newspapers—or was it two million?—throughout the land. Also I did not care for his creator, Harry Koven, who had called at the office Saturday evening, forty hours ago. He had kept chewing his upper lip with jagged yellow teeth, and it had seemed to me that he might at least have chewed the lower lip instead of the upper, which doesn't show teeth. Moreover, I had not cared for his job as he outlined it. Not that I was getting snooty about the renown of Nero Wolfe—a guy who has had a gun lifted has got as much right to buy good detective work as a rich duchess accused of murder—but the way this Harry Koven had programmed it he was going to do the detecting himself, so the only difference between me and a messenger boy was that I was taking a taxi instead of the subway.

Anyhow Wolfe had taken the job and there I was. I pulled a slip of paper from my pocket, typed on by me from notes taken of the talk with Harry Koven, and gave it a look.

MARCELLE KOVEN, wife
ADRIAN GETZ, friend or camp follower, maybe both
PATRICA LOWELL, agent (manager?), promoter
PETE JORDAN, artist, draws Dazzle Dan
BYRAM HILDEBRAND, artist, also draws D.D.

One of those five, according to Harry Koven, had stolen his gun, a Marley .32, and he wanted to know which one. As he had told it, that was all there was to it, but it was a cinch that if the missing object had been an electric shaver or a pair of cuff links it would not have called for all that lip-chewing, not to mention other signs of strain. He had gone out of his way, not once but twice, to declare that he had no reason to suspect any of the five of wanting to do any shooting. The second time he had made it so em-

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phatic that Wolfe had grunted and I had lifted a brow.

Since a Marley .32 is by no means a collector's item, it was no great coincidence that there was one in our arsenal and that therefore we were equipped to furnish Koven with the prop he wanted for his performance. As for the performance itself, the judicious thing to do was wait and see; but there was no point in being judicious about something I didn't like, so I had already checked it off as a dud.

I dismissed the taxi at the address on Seventy-sixth Street, east of Lexington Avenue. The house had had its front done over for the current century, unlike Nero Wolfe's old brownstone on West Thirty-fifth Street, which still sported the same front stoop it had started with. To enter this one you went down four steps instead of up seven, and I did so, after noting the pink shutters at the windows of all four floors and the tubs of evergreens flanking the entrance.

I was let in by a maid in uniform, with a pug nose and lipstick about as thick as Wolfe spreads Camembert on a wafer. I told her I had an appointment with Mr. Koven. She said Mr. Koven was not yet available and seemed to think that settled it, making me no offer for my hat and coat.

I said, "Our old brownstone, run by men only, is run better. When Fritz or I admit someone with an appointment we take his things."

"What's your name?" she demanded in a tone indicating that she doubted if I had one.

A loud male voice came from somewhere within. "Is that the man from Furnari's?"

A loud female voice came from up above. "Cora, is that my dress?"

I called out, "It's Archie Goodwin, expected by Mr. Koven at noon! It is now two minutes past twelve!"

That got action. The female voice, not quite so loud, told me to come up. The maid, looking frustrated, beat it. I took off my coat and put it on a chair, and my hat. A man came through a doorway at the rear of the hall and approached, speaking.

"More noise. Noisiest damn place. Up this way." He started up the stairs. "When you have an appointment with Sir Harry, always add an hour."

I followed him. At the top of the flight there was a large square hall with wide archways to rooms at right and left. He led me through the one at the left.

There are few rooms I can't take in at a glance, but that was one of them. Two huge TV cabinets, a monkey in a cage in a corner, chairs of all sizes and colors, rugs overlapping, a fireplace blazing away, the temperature around eighty—I gave it up and focused on the inhabitant. That was not only simpler but pleasanter. She was smaller than I would specify by choice, but

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otherwise acceptable, especially the wide smooth brow above the serious gray eyes, and the cheekbones. She must have been part salamander, to look so cool and silky in that oven.

"Dearest Pete," she said, "you are going to stop calling my husband Sir Harry."

I admired that as a time-saver. Instead of the usual pronouncement of names, she let me know that she was Marcelle, Mrs. Harry Koven, and that the young man was Pete Jordan, and at the same time told him something.

Pete Jordan walked across to her as for a purpose. He might have been going to take her in his arms or slap her or anything in between. But a pace short of her he stopped.

"You're wrong," he told her in his aggressive baritone. "It's according to plan. It's the only way I can prove I'm not a louse. No one but a louse would stick at this, doing this junk month after month, and here look at me just because I like to eat. I haven't got the guts to quit and starve a while, so I call him Sir Harry to make you sore, working myself up to calling him something that will make *him* sore, and eventually I'll come to a boil and figure out a way to make Getz sore, and then I'll get bounced and I can start starving and be an artist. It's a plan."

He turned and glared at me. "I'm more apt to go through with it if I announce it in front of a witness. You're the witness. My name's Jordan, Pete Jordan."

He shouldn't have tried glaring because he wasn't built for it. He wasn't much bigger than Mrs. Koven, and he had narrow shoulders and broad hips. An aggressive baritone and a defiant glare coming from that make-up just couldn't have the effect he was after. He needed coaching.

"You have already made me sore," she told his back in a nice low voice, but not a weak one. "You act like a brat and you're too old to be a brat. Why not grow up?"

He wheeled and snapped at her, "I look on you as a mother!"

That was a foul. They were both younger than me, and she couldn't have had more than three or four years on him.

I spoke. "Excuse me," I said, "but I am not a professional witness. I came to see Mr. Koven at his request. Shall I go hunt for him?"

A thin squeak came from behind me. "Good morning, Mrs. Koven. Am I early?"

As she answered I turned for a look at the owner of the squeak, who was advancing from the archway. He should have traded voices with Pete Jordan. He had both the size and presence for a deep baritone, with a well-made head topped by a healthy mat of gray hair nearly white. Everything about him was impressive and masterful, including the way he carried himself, but the

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squeak spoiled it completely. It continued as he joined us.

"I heard Mr. Goodwin, and Pete left, so I thought—"

Mrs. Koven and Pete were both talking too, and it didn't seem worth the effort to sort it out, especially when the monkey decided to join in and started chattering. Also I could feel sweat coming on my forehead and neck, over-dressed as I was with a coat and vest, since Pete and the newcomer were in shirt sleeves. I couldn't follow their example without displaying my holster. They kept it up, including the monkey, ignoring me completely but informing me incidentally that the squeaker was not Adrian Getz as I had first supposed, but Byram Hildebrand, Pete's coworker in the grind of drawing Dazzle Dan.

It was all very informal and homey, but I was starting to sizzle and I crossed to the far side of the room and opened a window wide. I expected an immediate reaction but got none. Disappointed at that but relieved by the rush of fresh air, I filled my chest, used my handkerchief on the brow and neck, turned, saw that we had company.

Coming through the archway was a pink-cheeked creature in a mink coat with a dark green slab of cork or something perched on her brown hair at a cocky slant. With no one bothering to glance at her except me, she moved across toward the fireplace, slid the coat off onto a couch, displaying a tricky plaid suit with an assortment of restrained colors, and said in a throaty voice that carried without being raised, "Rookaloo will be dead in an hour."

They were all shocked into silence except the monkey. Mrs. Koven looked around, saw the open window, and demanded, "Who did that?"

"I did," I said manfully.

Byram Hildebrand strode to the window like a general in front of troops and pulled it shut. The monkey stopped talking and started to cough.

"Listen to him," Pete Jordan said. His baritone mellowed when he was pleased. "Pneumonia already! That's an idea! That's what I'll do when I work up to making Getz sore."

Three of them went to the cage to take a look at Rookaloo, not bothering to greet or thank her who had come just in time to save the monkey's life. She stepped to me, asking cordially, "You're Archie Goodwin? I'm Pat Lowell." She put out a hand, and I took it. She had talent as a handclasper and backed it up with a good straight look out of clear brown eyes. "I was going to phone you this morning to warn you that Mr. Koven is never ready on time for an appointment, but he arranged this himself so I didn't."

"Never again," I told her, "pass up an excuse for phoning me."

"I won't." She took her hand back and glanced at her wrist.

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"You're early anyway. He told us the conference would be at twelve thirty."

"I was to come at twelve."

"Oh." She was taking me in—nothing offensive, but she sure was rating me. "To talk with him first?"

I shrugged. "I guess so."

She nodded, frowning a little. "This is a new one on me. I've been his agent and manager for three years now, handling all his business, everything from endorsements of cough drops to putting Dazzle Dan on scooters, and this is the first time a thing like this has happened, him getting someone in for a conference without consulting me—and Nero Wolfe, no less! I understand it's about a tie-up of Nero Wolfe and Dazzle Dan, having Dan start a detective agency?"

I put that question mark there, though her inflection left it to me whether to call it a question or merely a statement. I was caught off guard, so it probably showed on my face—my glee at the prospect of telling Wolfe about a tie-up between him and Dazzle Dan.

"We'd better wait," I said discreetly, "and let Mr. Koven tell it. As I understand it, I'm only here as a technical adviser, representing Mr. Wolfe because he never goes out on business. Of course you would handle the business end, and if that means you and I will have to have a lot of talks—"

I stopped because I had lost her. Her eyes were aimed past my left shoulder toward the archway, and their expression had suddenly and completely changed. They weren't exactly more alive or alert, but more concentrated. I turned, and there was Harry Koven crossing to us. His mop of black hair hadn't been combed, and he hadn't shaved. His big frame was enclosed in a red silk robe embroidered with yellow Dazzle Dans. A little guy in a dark blue suit was with him, at his elbow.

"Good morning, my little dazzlers!" Koven boomed.

"It seems cool in here," the little guy said in a gentle worried voice.

In some mysterious way the gentle little voice seemed to make more noise than the big boom. Certainly it was the gentle little voice that chopped off the return greetings from the dazzlers, but it could have been the combination of the two, the big man and the small one, that had so abruptly changed the atmosphere of the room. Before they had all been screwy perhaps, but all free and easy; now they were all tightened up. They even seemed to be tongue-tied, so I spoke.

"I opened a window," I said.

"Good heavens," the little guy mildly reproached me and trotted over to the monkey's cage. Mrs. Koven and Pete Jordan were in his path, and they hastily moved out of it, as if afraid of getting trampled, though he didn't look up to trampling anything bigger than a cricket. Not only was he too little and too

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old, but also he was vaguely deformed and trotted with a jerk.

Koven boomed at me, "So you got here! Don't mind the Squirt and his damn monkey. He loves that damn monkey. I call this the steam room." He let out a laugh. "How is it, Squirt, okay?"

"I think so, Harry. I hope so." The low gentle voice filled the room again.

"I hope so too, or God help Goodwin." Koven turned on Byram Hildebrand. "Has seven twenty-eight come, By?"

"No," Hildebrand squeaked. "I phoned Furnari, and he said it would be right over."

"Late again. We may have to change. When it comes, do a revise on the third frame. Where Dan says, 'Not tonight, my dear,' make it, 'Not today, my dear.' Got it?"

"But we discussed that—"

"I know, but change it. We'll change seven twenty-nine to fit. Have you finished seven thirty-three?"

"No. It's only—"

"Then what are you doing up here?"

"Why, Goodwin came, and you said you wanted us at twelve thirty —"

"I'll let you know when we're ready—sometime after lunch. Show me the revise on seven twenty-eight." Koven glanced around masterfully. "How is everybody? Blooming? See you all later. Come along, Goodwin, sorry you had to wait. Come with me."

He headed for the archway and I followed, across the hall and up the next flight of stairs. There the arrangement was different; instead of a big square hall there was a narrow corridor with four doors, all closed. He turned left, to the door at that end, opened it, held it for me to pass through, and shut it again. This room was an improvement in several ways: it was ten degrees cooler, it had no monkey, and the furniture left more room to move around. The most prominent item was a big old scarred desk over by a window. After inviting me to sit, Koven went to the desk and removed covers from dishes that were there on a tray.

"Breakfast," he said. "You had yours."

It wasn't a question, but I said yes to be sociable. He needed all the sociability he could get, from the looks of the tray. There was one dejected poached egg, one wavy thin piece of toast, three undersized prunes with about a teaspoonful of juice, a split of tonic water, and a glass. It was an awful sight. He waded into the prunes. When they were gone he poured the tonic water into the glass, took a sip, and demanded, "Did you bring it?"

"The gun? Sure."

"Let me see it."

"It's the one we showed you at the office." I moved to another chair, closer to him. "I'm supposed

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to check with you before we proceed. Is that the desk you kept your gun in?"

He nodded and swallowed a nibble of toast. "Here in this left-hand drawer, in the back."

"Loaded."

"Yes. I told you so."

"So you did. You also told us that you bought it two years ago in Montana, when you were there at a dude ranch, and brought it home with you and never bothered to get a license for it, and it's been there in the drawer right along. You saw it there a week or ten days ago, and last Friday you saw it was gone. You didn't want to call the cops for two reasons, because you have no license for it, and because you think it was taken by one of the five people whose names you gave—"

"I think it *may* have been."

"You didn't put it like that. However, skip it. You gave us the five names. By the way, was that Adrian Getz, the one you called Squirt?"

"Yes."

"Then they're all five here, and we can go ahead and get it over with. As I understand it, I am to put my gun there in the drawer where yours was, and you get them up here for a conference, with me present. You were to cook up something to account for me. Have you done that?"

He swallowed another nibble of toast and egg. Wolfe would have had that meal down in five seconds flat—or rather, he would have had it out the window. "I thought this might do," Koven said. "I can say that I'm considering a new stunt for Dan, have him start a detective agency, and I've called Nero Wolfe in for consultation, and he sent you up for a conference. We can discuss it a little, and I ask you to show us how a detective searches a room to give us an idea of the picture potential. You shouldn't start with the desk; start maybe with the shelves back of me. When you come to do the desk I'll push my chair back to be out of your way, and I'll have them right in front of me. When you open the drawer and take the gun out and they see it—"

"I thought you were going to do that."

"I know, that's what I said, but this is better because this way they'll be looking at the gun and you, and I'll be watching their faces. I'll have my eye right on them, and the one that took my gun, if one of them did it—when he or she suddenly sees you pull a gun out of the drawer that's exactly like it, it's going to show on his face, and I'm going to see it. We'll do it that way."

I admit it sounded better there on the spot than it had in Wolfe's office—and besides, he had revised it. This way he might really get what he wanted.

"It sounds all right," I conceded, "except for one thing. You'll be expecting a look of surprise, but what

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if there are five looks of surprise? At seeing me take a gun out of your desk—those who don't know you had a gun there."

"But they do know."

"All of them?"

"Certainly. I thought I told you that. Anyhow, they all know. Everybody knows everything around this place. They thought I ought to get rid of it, and now I wish I had. You understand, Goodwin, all there is to this—I just want to know where the damn thing is, I want to know who took it, and I'll handle it myself from there. I told Wolfe that."

"I know you did." I got up and went to his side of the desk, at his left, and pulled a drawer open. "In here?"

"Yes."

"The rear compartment?"

"Yes."

I reached to my holster for the Marley, broke it, removed the cartridges and dropped them into my vest pocket, put the gun in the drawer, shut the drawer, and returned to my chair.

"Okay," I said, "get them up here. We can ad lib it all right without any rehearsing."

He looked at me. He opened the drawer for a peek at the gun, not touching it, and pushed the drawer to.

"I'm going to have to get my nerve up," he said, as if appealing to me. "I'm never much good until late afternoon."

I grunted. "What the hell. You told me to be here at noon and called the conference for twelve thirty."

"I know I did. I do things like that. And I've got to dress." Suddenly his voice went high in protest. "Don't try to rush me, understand?"

I was fed up, but had already invested a lot of time and a dollar for a taxi, so kept calm. "I know," I told him, "artists are temperamental. But I'll explain how Mr. Wolfe charges. He sets a fee, depending on the job, and if it takes more of my time than he thinks reasonable he adds an extra hundred dollars an hour. Keeping me here until late afternoon would be expensive. I could go and come back."

He didn't like that and said so, explaining why, the idea being that with me there in the house it would be easier for him to get his nerve up and it might only take an hour or so. He got up and walked to the door and opened it, then turned and demanded, "Do you know how much I make an hour? The time I spend on my work? Over a thousand dollars. More than a thousand an hour! I'll go get some clothes on."

He went, shutting the door.

My wrist watch said 1:17. My stomach agreed. I sat maybe ten minutes, then went to the phone on the desk, dialed, got Wolfe, and told him how it was. He told me to go

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out and get some lunch, naturally, and I said I would, but after hanging up I went back to my chair. If I went out, sure as hell Koven would get his nerve up in my absence, and by the time I got back he would have lost it again and have to start over. I explained the situation to my stomach, and it made a polite sound of protest, but I was the boss. I was glancing at my watch again and seeing 1:42 when the door opened and Mrs. Koven was with me.

When I stood, her serious gray eyes beneath the wide smooth brow were level with the knot in my four-in-hand. She said her husband had told her that I was staying for a conference at a later hour. I confirmed it. She said I ought to have something to eat. I agreed that it was not a bad notion.

"Won't you," she invited, "come down and have a sandwich with us? We don't do any cooking, we even have our breakfast sent in, but there are some sandwiches."

"I don't want to be rude," I told her, "but are they in the room with the monkey?"

"Oh, no." She stayed serious. "Wouldn't that be awful? Downstairs in the workroom." She touched my arm. "Come on, do."

I went downstairs with her.

In a large room at the rear on the ground floor the other four suspects were seated around a plain wooden table, dealing with the sandwiches. The room was a mess —drawing tables under fluorescent lights, open shelves crammed with papers, cans of all sizes, and miscellaneous objects, chairs scattered around, other shelves with books and portfolios, and tables with more stacks of papers. Messy as it was to the eye, it was even messier to the ear, for two radios were going full blast.

Marcelle Koven and I joined them at the lunch table, and I perked up at once. There was a basket of French bread and pumpernickel, paper platters piled with slices of ham, smoked turkey, sturgeon, and hot corned beef, a big slab of butter, mustard and other accessories, bottles of milk, a pot of steaming coffee, and a one-pound jar of fresh caviar. Seeing Pete Jordan spooning caviar onto a piece of bread crust, I got what he meant about liking to eat.

"Help yourself!" Pat Lowell yelled into my ear.

I reached for the bread with one hand and the corned beef with the other and yelled back, "Why doesn't someone turn them down or even off?"

She took a sip of coffee from a paper cup and shook her head. "One's By Hildebrand's and one's Pete Jordan's! They like different programs when they're working! They have to go for volume!"

It was a hell of a din, but the corned beef was wonderful and the bread must have been from Rusterman's, nor was there anything

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wrong with the turkey and sturgeon. Since the radio duel precluded table talk, I used my eyes for diversion and was impressed by Adrian Getz, whom Koven called the Squirt. He would break off a rectangle of bread crust, place a rectangle of sturgeon on it, arrange a mound of caviar on top, and pop it in. When it was down he would take three sips of coffee and then start over. He was doing that when Mrs. Koven and I arrived and he was still doing it when I was full and reaching for another paper napkin.

Eventually, though, he stopped. He pushed back his chair, left it, went over to a sink at the wall, held his fingers under the faucet, and dried them with his handkerchief. Then he trotted over to a radio and turned it off, and to the other one and turned that off. Then he trotted back to us and spoke apologetically.

"That was uncivil, I know."

No one contradicted him.

"It was only," he went on, "that I wanted to ask Mr. Goodwin something before going up for my nap." His eyes settled on me. "Did you know when you opened that window that sudden cold drafts are dangerous for tropical monkeys?"

His tone was more than mild, it was wistful. But something about him—I didn't know what and didn't ask for time out to go into it—got my goat.

"Sure," I said cheerfully. "I was trying it out."

"That was thoughtless," he said, not complaining, just giving his modest opinion, and turned and trotted out of the room.

There was a strained silence. Pat Lowell reached for the pot to pour some coffee.

"Goodwin, God help you," Pete Jordan muttered.

"Why? Does he sting?"

"Don't ask me why, but watch your step. I think he's a kobold." He tossed his paper napkin onto the table. "Want to see an artist create? Come and look." He marched to one of the radios and turned it on, then to a drawing table and sat.

"I'll clean up," Pat Lowell offered.

Byram Hildebrand, who had not squeaked once that I heard, went and turned on the other radio before he took his place at another drawing table.

Mrs. Koven left us. I helped Pat Lowell clear up the lunch table, but all that did was pass time, since both radios were going and I rely mostly on talk to develop an acquaintance in the early stages. Then she left, and I strolled over to watch the artists. So far nothing had occurred to change my opinion of Dazzle Dan, but I had to admire the way they did him. Working from rough sketches which all looked alike to me, they turned out the finished product in three colors so fast I could barely keep up, walking back and forth. The only interruptions for a long stretch were

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when Hildebrand jumped up to go and turn his radio louder, and a minute later Pete Jordan did likewise. I sat down and concentrated on the experiment of listening to two stations at once, but after a while my brain started to curdle and I got out of there.

A door toward the front of the lower hall was standing open, and I stepped inside when I saw Pat Lowell at a desk, working with papers. She looked up to nod and went on working.

"Listen a minute," I said. "We're here on a desert island, and for months you have been holding me at arm's length, and I'm desperate. It is not mere propinquity. In rags and tatters as you are, without make-up, I have come to look upon you—"

"I'm busy," she said emphatically. "Go play with a coconut."

"You'll regret this," I said savagely and went to the hall and looked through the glass of the front door at the outside world. The view was nothing to brag about, and the radios were still at my eardrums, so I went upstairs. Looking through the archway into the room at the left, and seeing no one but the monkey in its cage, I crossed to the other room and entered. It was full of furniture, but there was no sign of life. As I went up the second flight of stairs it seemed that the sound of the radios was getting louder instead of softer, and at the top I knew why. A radio was going the other side of one of the closed doors.

I went and opened the door to the room where I had talked with Koven; not there. I tried another door and was faced by shelves stacked with linen. I knocked on another, got no response, opened it, and stepped in. It was a large bedroom, very fancy, with an oversized bed. The furniture and fittings showed that it was co-ed. A radio on a stand was giving with a soap opera, and stretched out on a couch was Mrs. Koven, sound asleep. She looked softer and not so serious, with her lips parted a little and relaxed fingers curled on the cushion, in spite of the yapping radio on the bedside table.

I damn well intended to find Koven, and took a couple of steps with a vague notion of looking under the bed for him, when a glance through an open door at the right into the next room discovered him. He was standing at a window with his back to me. Thinking it might seem a little familiar on short acquaintance for me to enter from the bedroom where his wife was snoozing, I backed out to the hall, pulling the door to, moved to the next door, and knocked. Getting no reaction, I turned the knob and entered.

The radio had drowned out my noise. He remained at the window. I banged the door shut. He jerked around. He said something, but I didn't get it on account of the ra-

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dio. I went and closed the door to the bedroom, and that helped some.

"Well?" he demanded, as if he couldn't imagine who I was or what I wanted.

He had shaved and combed and had on a well-made brown homespun suit, with a tan shirt and red tie.

"It's going on four o'clock," I said, "and I'll be going soon and taking my gun with me."

He took his hands from his pockets and dropped into a chair. Evidently this was the Koven personal living room, from the way it was furnished, and it looked fairly livable.

He spoke. "I was standing at the window thinking."

"Yeah. Any luck?"

He sighed and stretched his legs out. "Fame and fortune," he said, "are not all a man needs for happiness."

"What else would you suggest?" I asked brightly.

He undertook to tell me. He went on and on, but I won't report it verbatim because I doubt if it contained any helpful hints for you—I know it didn't for me. I grunted from time to time to be polite. I listened to him for a while and then got a little relief by listening to the soap opera on the radio, which was muffled some by the closed door but by no means inaudible. Eventually, of course, he got around to his wife, first briefing me by explaining that she was his third and they had been married only two years. To my surprise he didn't tear her apart. He said she was wonderful. His point was that even when you added to fame and fortune the companionship of a beloved and loving wife who was fourteen years younger than you, that still wasn't all you needed for happiness.

There was one interruption—a knock on the door and the appearance of Byram Hildebrand. He had come to show the revise on the third frame of Number 728. They discussed art some, and Koven okayed the revise, and Hildebrand departed. I hoped that the intermission had sidetracked Koven, but no; he took up again where he had left off.

I can take a lot when I'm working on a case, even a kindergarten problem like that one, but finally, after the twentieth sidewise glance at my wrist, I called a halt.

"Look," I said, "this has given me a new slant on life, and don't think I don't appreciate it, but it's a quarter past four and it's getting dark. I would call it late afternoon. What do you say we go ahead with our act?"

He closed his trap and frowned at me. He started chewing his lip. After some of that he suddenly arose, went to a cabinet, and got out a bottle.

"Will you join me?" He produced two glasses. "I'm not supposed to drink until five o'clock, but I'll make this an exception." He

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came to me. "Bourbon all right? Say when."

I would have liked to plug him. He had known from the beginning that he would have to drink himself up to it but had sucked me in with a noon appointment. Anything I felt like saying would have been justified, but I held in. I accepted mine and raised it with him, to encourage him, and took a swallow. He took a dainty sip, raised his eyes to the ceiling, then emptied the glass at a gulp. He picked up the bottle and poured a refill.

"Why don't we go in there with the refreshment," I suggested, "and go over it a little?"

"Don't rush me," he said gloomily. He took a deep breath, swelling his chest, and suddenly grinned at me, showing the teeth. He lifted the glass and drained it, reached for the bottle and tilted it to pour, and changed his mind.

"Come on," he said, heading for the door. I stepped around him to open the door, since both his hands were occupied, closed it behind us, and followed him down the hall. At the farther end we entered the room where we were to stage it. He went to the desk and sat, poured himself a drink, and put the bottle down. I went to the desk too, but not to sit. I had taken the precaution of removing the cartridges from my gun, but even so a glance at it wouldn't hurt any. I pulled the drawer open and was relieved to see that it was still there. I shut the drawer.

"I'll go get them," I offered.

"I said don't rush me," Koven protested, but no longer gloomy.

Thinking that two more drinks would surely do it, I moved to a chair. But I didn't sit. Something wasn't right, and it came to me what it was: I had placed the gun with the muzzle pointing to the right, and it wasn't that way now. I returned to the desk, took the gun out, and gave it a look.

It was a Marley .32 all right—but not mine.

I put my eye on Koven. The gun was in my left hand, and my right hand was a fist. If I had hit him that first second, which I nearly did, mad as I was, I would have cracked some knuckles.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

My eyes were on him and through him. I kept them there for five pulse beats. It wasn't possible, I decided, that he was that good. Nobody could be.

I backed up a pace. "We've found your gun."

He gawked at me. "What?"

I broke it, saw that the cylinder was empty, and held it out. "Take a look."

He took it. "It looks the same—no, it doesn't."

"Certainly it doesn't. Mine was clean and bright. Is it yours?"

"I don't know. It looks like it. But how in the name of—"

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I reached and took it from him. "How do you think? Someone with hands took mine out and put yours in. It could have been you. Was it?"

"No. Me?" Suddenly he got indignant. "How the hell could it have been me when I didn't know where mine was?"

"You said you didn't. I ought to stretch you out and tamp you down. Keeping me here the whole damn day, and now this! If you ever talk straight and to the point, now is the time. Did you touch my gun?"

"No. But you're—"

"Do you know who did?"

"No. But you're—"

"Shut up!" I went around the desk to the phone, lifted it, and dialed. At that hour Wolfe would be up in the plant rooms for his afternoon shift with the orchids, where he was not to be disturbed except in emergency, but this was one. When Fritz answered I asked him to buzz the extension, and in a moment I had Wolfe.

"Yes, Archie?" Naturally he was peevish.

"Sorry to bother you, but I'm at Koven's. I put my gun in his desk, and we were all set for his stunt, but he kept putting it off until now. His will power sticks and has to be primed with alcohol. I roamed around. We just came in here where his desk is, and I opened the drawer for a look. Someone has taken my gun and substituted his—his that was stolen, you know? It's back where it belongs, but mine is gone."

"You shouldn't have left it there."

"Okay, but I need instructions for now. Three choices: I can call a cop, or I can bring the whole bunch down there to you, or I can handle it myself. Which?"

"Confound it, not the police. They would enjoy it too much. And why bring them here? The gun's there, not here."

"Then that leaves me. I go ahead?"

"Certainly—with due discretion. It's a prank." He chuckled. "I would like to see your face. Try to get home for dinner." He hung up.

"My God, don't call a cop!" Koven protested.

"I don't intend to," I said grimly. I slipped his gun into my armpit holster. "Not if I can help it. It depends partly on you. You stay put, right here. I'm going down and get them. Your wife's asleep in the bedroom. If I find when I get back that you've gone and started chatting with her I'll either slap you down with your own gun or phone the police, I don't know which, maybe both. Stay put."

"This is my house, Goodwin, and—"

"Damn it, don't you know a raving maniac when you see one?" I tapped my chest with a forefinger. "Me. When I'm as sore as I am now the safest thing would be for *you* to call a cop. I want my gun."

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As I made for the door he was reaching for the bottle. By the time I got down to the ground floor I had myself well enough in hand to speak to them without betraying any special urgency, telling them that Koven was ready for them upstairs, for the conference. I found Pat Lowell still at the desk in the room in front and Hildebrand and Jordan still at their drawing tables in the workroom. I even replied appropriately when Pat Lowell asked how I had made out with the coconut. As Hildebrand and Jordan left their tables and turned off their radios I had a keener eye on them than before; someone here had swiped my gun. As we ascended the first flight of stairs, with me in the rear, I asked their backs where I would find Adrian Getz.

Pat Lowell answered. "He may be in his room on the top floor." They halted at the landing, the edge of the big square hall, and I joined them. We could hear the radio going upstairs. She indicated the room to the left. "He takes his afternoon nap in there with Rookaloo, but not this late usually."

I thought I might as well glance in, and moved to the archway. A draft of cold air hit me, and I went on in. A window was wide open! I marched over and closed it, then went to take a look at the monkey. It was huddled on the floor in a corner of the cage, making angry little noises, with something clutched in its fingers against its chest. The light was dim, but I have good eyes, and not only was the something unmistakably a gun, but it was my Marley on a bet. Needing light, and looking for a wall switch, I was passing the large couch which faced the fireplace when suddenly I stopped and froze.

Adrian Getz, the Squirt, was lying on the couch but he wasn't taking a nap.

I bent over him for a close-up and saw a hole in his skull northeast of his right ear, and some red juice. I stuck a hand inside the V of his vest and flattened it against him and held my breath for eight seconds. He was through taking naps.

I straightened up and called, "Come in here, all three of you, and switch on a light as you come!"

They appeared through the archway, and one of them put a hand to the wall. Lights shone. The back of the couch hid Getz from their view as they approached.

"It's cold in here," Pat Lowell was saying. "Did you open another—"

Seeing Getz stopped her, and the others too. They goggled.

"Don't touch him," I warned them. "He's dead, so you can't help him any. Don't touch anything. You three stay here together, right here in this room, while I—"

"God Almighty," Pete Jordan blurted. Hildebrand squeaked something. Pat Lowell put out a hand, found the couch back, and gripped it. She asked something,

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but I wasn't listening. I was at the cage, with my back to them, peering at the monkey. It was my Marley the monkey was clutching. I had to curl my fingers until the nails sank in to keep from opening the cage door and grabbing that gun.

I whirled. "Stick here together. Understand?" I was on my way. "I'm going up and phone."

Ignoring their noises, I left them. I mounted the stairs in no hurry, because if I had been a raving maniac before, I was now stiff with fury and I needed a few seconds to get under control. In the room upstairs Harry Koven was still seated at the desk, staring at the open drawer. He looked up and fired a question at me but got no answer. I went to the phone, lifted it, and dialed a number. When I got Wolfe he started to sputter at being disturbed again.

"I'm sorry," I told him, "but I wish to report that I have found my gun. It's in the cage with the monkey, who is—"

"What monkey?"

"It's name is Rookaloo, but please don't interrupt. It is holding my gun to its breast, I suspect because it is cold and the gun is warm, having recently been fired. Lying there on a couch is the body of a man, Adrian Getz, with a bullet hole in the head. It is no longer a question whether I call a cop, I merely wanted to report the situation to you before I do so. A thousand to one Getz was shot and killed with my gun. I will not be—hold it—"

I dropped the phone and jumped. Koven had made a dive for the door. I caught him before he reached it, got an arm and his chin, and heaved. There was a lot of feeling in it, and big as he was he sailed to a wall, bounced off, and went to the floor.

"I would love to do it again," I said, meaning it, and returned to the phone and told Wolfe, "Excuse me, Koven tried to interrupt. I was only going to say I will not be home to dinner."

"The man is dead."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you anything satisfactory for the police?"

"Sure. My apologies for bringing my gun here to oblige a murderer. That's all."

"We haven't answered today's mail."

"I know. It's a damn shame. I'll get away as soon as I can."

"Very well."

The connection went. I held the button down a moment, with an eye on Koven, who was upright again but not asking for an encore, then released it and dialed the police.

I haven't kept anything like an accurate score, but I would say that over the years I haven't told the cops more than a couple of dozen barefaced lies, maybe not that many. They are seldom practical.

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On the other hand, I can't recall any murder case Wolfe and I were in on and I've had my story gone into at length where I have simply opened the bag and given them all I had, with no dodging and no withholding, except one, and this is it. On the murder of Adrian Getz I didn't have a single thing on my mind that I wasn't willing and eager to shovel out, so I let them have it.

It worked fine. They called me a liar.

Not right away, of course. At first even Inspector Cramer appreciated my cooperation, knowing as he did that there wasn't a man in his army who could shade me at seeing and hearing, remembering and reporting. It was generously conceded that on finding the body I had performed properly and promptly, herding the trio into the room and keeping the Kovens from holding a family council until the law arrived. From there on, of course, everyone had been under surveillance, including me.

At six thirty, when the scientists were still monopolizing the room where Getz had got it, and city employees were wandering all over the place, and the various inmates were still in various rooms conversing privately with Homicide men, and I had typed and signed my own frank and full statement, I was confidently expecting that I would soon be out on the sidewalk unattended, flagging a taxi. I was in the front room on the ground floor, seated at Pat Lowell's desk, having used her typewriter, and Sergeant Purley Stebbins was sitting across from me, looking over my statement.

He lifted his head and regarded me, perfectly friendly. A perfectly friendly look from Stebbins would, from almost anyone else, cause you to get your guard up and be ready to either duck or counter, but Purley wasn't responsible for the design of his big bony face and his pig-bristle eyebrows.

"I guess you got it all in," he admitted. "As you told it."

"I suggest," I said modestly, "that when this case is put away you send that to the school to be used as a model report."

"Yeah." He stood up. "You're a good typist." He turned to go.

I arose too, saying casually, "I can run along now?"

The door opened and Inspector Cramer entered. I didn't like his expression as he darted a glance at me. Knowing him well in all his moods, I didn't like the way his broad shoulders were hunched, or his clamped jaw, or the glint in his eye.

"Here's Goodwin's statement," Purley said. "Okay."

"Send him downtown and hold him."

It caught me completely off balance. "Hold *me?*" I demanded, squeaking almost like Hildebrand.

"Yes, sir." Nothing could catch

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Purley off balance. "On your order?"

"No, charge him. Sullivan Act. He has no license for the gun we found on him."

"Ha, ha," I said. "Ha, ha, and ha, ha. There, you got your laugh. A very fine gag. Ha."

"You're going down, Goodwin. I'll be down to see you later."

As I said, I knew him well. He meant it. I had his eyes. "This," I said, "is way out of my reach. I've told you where and how and why I got that gun." I pointed to the paper in Purley's hand. "Read it. It's all down, punctuated."

"You had the gun in your holster and you have no license for it."

"Nuts. But I get it. You've been hoping for years to hang something on Nero Wolfe, and to you I'm just a part of him, and you think here's your chance. Of course it won't stick. Wouldn't you rather have something that will? Like resisting arrest and assaulting an officer? Glad to oblige. Watch it—"

Tipping forward, I started a left hook for his jaw, fast and vicious, then jerked it down and went back on my heels. It didn't create a panic, but I had the satisfaction of seeing Cramer take a quick step back and Stebbins one forward. They bumped.

"There," I said. "With both of you to swear to it, that ought to be good for at least two years. I'll throw the typewriter at you if you'll promise to catch it."

"Cut the clowning," Purley growled.

"You lied about that gun," Cramer snapped. "If you don't want to get taken down to think it over, think now. Tell me what you came here for and what happened."

"I've told you."

"A string of lies."

"No, sir."

"You can have 'em back. I'm not trying to hang something on Wolfe, or you either. I want to know why you came here and what happened."

"Oh, for God's sake." I moved my eyes. "Okay, Purley, where's my escort?"

Cramer strode four paces to the door, opened it, and called, "Bring Mr. Koven in here!"

Harry Koven entered with a dick at his elbow. He looked as if he was even farther away from happiness than before.

"We'll sit down," Cramer said.

He left me behind the desk. Purley and the dick took chairs in the background. Cramer stationed himself across the desk from me, where Purley had been, with Koven on a chair at his left. He opened up.

"I told you, Mr. Koven, that I would ask you to repeat your story in Goodwin's presence, and you said you would."

Koven nodded. "That's right." He was hoarse.

"We won't need all the details. Just answer me briefly. When you called on Nero Wolfe last Saturday

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evening, what did you ask him to do?"

"I told him I was going to have Dazzle Dan start a detective agency in a new series. I told him I needed technical assistance, and possibly a tie-up, if we could arrange—"

There was a pad of ruled paper on the desk. I reached for it, and a pencil, and started doing shorthand. Cramer leaned over, stretched an arm, grabbed a corner of the pad, and jerked it away.

"We need your full attention," Cramer growled. He went to Koven. "Did you say anything to Wolfe about your gun being taken from your desk?"

"Certainly not. It hadn't been taken. I did mention that I had a gun in my desk for which I had no license, but that I never carried it, and I asked if that was risky. I told them what make it was, a Marley thirty-two. I asked how much trouble it would be to get a license, and if—"

"Keep it brief. Just cover the points. What arrangement did you make with Wolfe?"

"He agreed to send Goodwin to my place on Monday for a conference with my staff and me."

"About what?"

"About the technical problems of having Dazzle Dan do detective work, and possibly a tie-up."

"And Goodwin came?"

"Yes, today around noon." Koven's hoarseness kept interfering with him, and he kept clearing his throat. My eyes were at his face, but he hadn't met them. Of course he was talking to Cramer and had to be polite. He went on, "The conference was for twelve thirty, but I had a little talk with Goodwin and asked him to wait. I have to be careful what I do with Dan and I wanted to think it over some more. Anyway I'm like that, I put things off. It was after four o'clock when he —"

"Was your talk with Goodwin about your gun being gone?"

"Certainly not. We might have mentioned the gun, about my not having a license for it, I don't remember—no, wait a minute, we must have, because I pulled the drawer open and we glanced in at it. Except for that, we only talked —"

"Did you or Goodwin take your gun out of the drawer?"

"No. Absolutely not."

"Did he put his gun in the drawer?"

"Absolutely not."

I slid in, "When I gook my gun from my holster to show it to you, did you—"

"Nothing doing," Cramer snapped at me. "You're listening. Just the high spots for now." He returned to Koven. "Did you have another talk with Goodwin later?"

Koven nodded. "Yes, around half-past three he came up to my room—the living room. We talked until after four, there and in my office, and then—"

"In your office did Goodwin open

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the drawer of the desk and take the gun out and say it had been changed?"

"Certainly not!"

"What did he do?"

"Nothing, only we talked, and then he left to go down and get the others to come up for the conference. After a while he came back alone, and without saying anything he came to the desk and took my gun from the drawer and put it under his coat. Then he went to the phone and called Nero Wolfe. When I heard him tell Wolfe that Adrian Getz had been shot, that he was on a couch downstairs dead, I got up to go down there, and Goodwin jumped me from behind and knocked me out. When I came to he was still talking to Wolfe, I don't know what he was telling him, and then he called the police. He wouldn't let me—"

"Hold it," Cramer said curtly. "That covers that. One more point. Do you know of any motive for Goodwin's wanting to murder Adrian Getz?"

"No, I don't. I told—"

"Then if Getz was shot with Goodwin's gun how would you account for it? You're not obliged to account for it, but if you don't mind just repeat what you told me."

"Well—" Koven hesitated. He cleared his throat for the twentieth time. "I told you about the monkey. Goodwin opened a window, and that's enough to kill that kind of monkey, and Getz was very fond of it. He didn't show how upset he was but Getz was very quiet and didn't show things much. I understand Goodwin likes to kid people. Of course I don't know what happened, but if Goodwin went in there later when Getz was there, and started to open a window, you can't tell. When Getz once got aroused he was apt to do anything. He couldn't have hurt Goodwin any, but Goodwin might have got out his gun just for a gag, and Getz tried to take it away, and it went off accidentally. That wouldn't be murder, would it?"

"No," Cramer said, "that would only be a regrettable accident. That's all for now, Mr. Koven. Take him out, Sol, and bring Hildebrand."

As Koven arose and the dick came forward I reached for the phone on Pat Lowell's desk. My hand got there, but so did Cramer's, hard on top of mine.

"The lines here are busy," he stated. "There'll be a phone you can use downtown. Do you want to hear Hildebrand before you comment?"

"I'm crazy to hear Hildebrand," I assured him. "No doubt he'll explain that I tossed the gun in the monkey's cage to frame the monkey. Let's just wait for Hildebrand."

It wasn't much of a wait; the Homicide boys are snappy. Byram Hildebrand, ushered in by Sol, gave

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me a long straight look before he took the chair Koven had vacated. He still had good presence, with his fine mat of nearly white hair, but his extremities were nervous. When he sat he couldn't find comfortable spots for either his hands or his feet.

"This will only take a minute," Cramer told him. "I just want to check on Sunday morning. Yesterday. You were here working?"

Hildebrand nodded, and the squeak came. "I was putting on some touches. I often work Sundays."

"You were in there in the workroom?"

"Yes. Mr. Getz was there, making some suggestions. I was doubtful about one of his suggestions and went uptairs to consult Mr. Koven, but Mrs. Koven was there in the hall and—"

"You mean the big hall one flight up?"

"Yes. She said Mr. Koven wasn't up yet and Miss Lowell was in his office waiting to see him. Miss Lowell has extremely good judgment, and I went up to consult her. She disapproved of Mr. Getz's suggestion, and we discussed various matters, and mention was made of the gun Mr. Koven kept in his desk drawer. I pulled the drawer open just to look at it, with no special purpose, merely to look at it, and closed the drawer again. Shortly afterward I returned downstairs."

"Was the gun there in the drawer?"

"Yes."

"Did you take it out?"

"No. Neither did Miss Lowell. We didn't touch it."

"But you recognized it as the same gun?"

"I can't say that I did, no. I had never examined the gun, never had it in my hand. I can only say that it looked the same as before. It was my opinion that our concern about the gun being kept there was quite childish, but I see now that I was wrong. After what happened today—"

"Yeah." Cramer cut him off. "Concern about a loaded gun is never childish. That's all I'm after now. Okay, that's all." Cramer nodded at Sol. "Take him back to Rowcliff."

I treated myself to a good deep breath. Purley was squinting at me, not gloating, just concentrating. Cramer turned his head to see that the door was closed after the dick and the artist, then turned back to me.

"Your turn," he growled.

I shook my head. "Lost my voice," I whispered.

"You're not funny, Goodwin. You're never as funny as you think you are. This time you're not funny at all. You can have five minutes to go over it and realize how complicated it is. When you phoned Wolfe *before* you phoned us, you couldn't possibly have arranged all the de-

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tails. I've got you. I'll be leaving here before long to join you downtown, and on my way I'll stop in at Wolfe's place for a talk. He won't clam up on this one. At the very least I've got you good on the Sullivan Act. Want five minutes?"

"No, sir." I was calm but emphatic. "I want five days and I would advise you to take a full week. Complicated doesn't begin to describe it. Before I leave for downtown, if you're actually going to crawl out on that one, I wish to remind you of something, and don't forget it. When I voluntarily took Koven's gun from my holster and turned it over—it wasn't 'found on me,' as you put it—I also turned over six nice clean cartridges which I had in my vest pocket, having previously removed them from my gun. I hope none of your heroes gets careless and mixes them up with the cartridges found in my gun, if any, when you retrieved it from the monkey. That would be a mistake. The point is, if I removed the cartridges from my gun in order to insert one or more from Koven's gun, when and why did I do it? There's a day's work for you right there. And if I did do it, then Koven's friendly effort to fix me up for justifiable manslaughter is wasted, much as I appreciate it, because I must have been premeditating something, and you know what. Why fiddle around with the Sullivan Act? Make it the big one. Now I button up."

Cramer eyed me. "Even a suspended sentence," he said, "you lose your license."

I grinned at him.

"Send him down," Cramer rasped.

Even when a man is caught smack in the middle of a felony, as I had been, there is a certain amount of red tape to getting him behind bars, and in my case not only red tape but also other activities postponed my attainment of privacy. First, I had a long conversation with an Assistant District Attorney, who was the suave and subtle type and even ate sandwiches with me. When it was over, a little after nine o'clock, both of us were only slightly more confused than when we started. He left me in a room with a specimen in uniform with slick brown hair and a wart on his cheek. I told him how to get rid of the wart, recommending Doc Vollmer.

I was expecting the promised visit by Inspector Cramer any minute. Naturally I was nursing an assorted collection of resentments, but the one on top was at not being there to see and hear the talk between Cramer and Wolfe. Any chat those two had was always worth listening to, and that one must have been outstanding, with Wolfe learning not only that his client was lying five ways from Sunday, which was bad enough, but also that I had been tossed in the can and the day's

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mail would have to go unanswered.

When the door finally opened and a visitor entered it wasn't Inspector Cramer. It was Lieutenant Rowcliff, whose murder I will not have to premeditate when I get around to it because I have already done the premeditating. There are not many murderers so vicious and inhuman that I would enjoy seeing them caught by Rowcliff. He jerked a chair around to sit facing me and said with oily satisfaction, "At last we've got you."

That set the tone of the interview.

I would enjoy recording in full that two-hour session with Rowcliff, but it would sound like bragging, and therefore I don't suppose you would enjoy it too. His biggest handicap is that when he gets irritated to a certain point he can't help stuttering, and I'm onto him enough to tell when he's just about there, and then I start stuttering before he does. Even with a close watch and careful timing it takes luck to do it right, and that evening I was lucky. He came closer than ever before to plugging me, but didn't, because he wants to be a captain so bad he can taste it and he's not absolutely sure that Wolfe hasn't got a solid in with the Commissioner or even the Mayor.

Cramer never showed up, and that added another resentment to my healthy pile. I knew he had been to see Wolfe, because when they had finally let me make my phone call, around eight o'clock, and I had got Wolfe and started to tell him about it, he interrupted me in a voice as cold as an Eskimo's nose.

"I know where you are and how you got there. Mr. Cramer is here. I have phoned Mr. Parker, but it's too late to do anything tonight. Have you had anything to eat?"

"No, sir. I'm afraid of poison and I'm on a hunger strike."

"You should eat something. Mr. Cramer is worse than a jackass, he's demented. I intend to persuade him, if possible, of the desirability of releasing you at once."

He hung up.

When, shortly after eleven, Rowcliff called it off and I was shown to my room, there had been no sign of Cramer. The room was in no way remarkable, merely what was to be expected in a structure of that type; but it was fairly clean, strongly scented with disinfectant, and was in a favorable location since the nearest corridor light was six paces away and therefore did not glare through the bars of my door. Also it was a single, which I appreciated. Alone at last, away from telephones and other interruptions, I undressed and arranged my gray pinstripe on the chair, draped my shirt over the end of the blankets, got in, stretched, and settled down for a complete survey of the complications. But my brain and nerves had other plans, and in twenty seconds I was asleep.

In the morning there was a cer-

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tain amount of activity, with the check-off and a trip to the lavatory and breakfast, but after that I had more privacy than I really cared for. By noon I would almost have welcomed a visit from Rowcliff and was beginning to suspect that someone had lost a paper and there was no record of me anywhere and everyone was too busy to stop and think. Lunch, which I will not describe, broke the monotony some, but then, back in my room, I decided to spread all the pieces out, sort them, and have a look at the picture as it had been drawn to date; but it got so damn jumbled that I couldn't make first base, let alone on around.

At 1:09 my door swung open and the floorwalker, a chunky short guy with only half an ear on the right side, told me to come along. I went willingly, on out of the block to an elevator, and along a ground-floor corridor to an office. There I was pleased to see the tall lanky figure and long pale face of Henry George Parker, the only lawyer Wolfe would admit to the bar if he had the say. He came to shake my hand and said he'd have me out of there in a minute now.

"No rush," I said stiffly. "Don't let it interfere with anything important."

He laughed, haw-haw, and took me inside the gate. All the formalities but one which required my presence had already been attended to, and he made good on his minute. On the way up in the taxi he explained why I had been left to rot until past noon. Getting bail on the Sullivan Act charge had been simple, but I had also been tagged with a material witness warrant, and the D.A. had asked the judge to put it at fifty grand! He had been stubborn about it, and the best Parker could do was talk it down to twenty, and he had had to report back to Wolfe before closing the deal. I was not to leave the jurisdiction. As the taxi crossed Thirty-fourth Street I looked west across the river. I had never cared much for New Jersey, but now the idea of driving through the tunnel and on among the billboards seemed attractive.

I preceded Parker up the stoop at the old brownstone on West Thirty-fifth, used my key but found that the chain bolt was on, which was normal but not invariable when I was out of the house, and had to push the button. Fritz Brenner, chef and house manager, let us in and stood while we disposed of our coats and hats.

"Are you all right, Archie?" he inqured.

"No," I said frankly. "Don't you smell me?"

As we went down the hall Wolfe appeared, coming from the door to the dining room. He stopped and regarded me. I returned his gaze with my chin up.

"I'll go up and rinse off," I said, "while you're finishing lunch."

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"I've finished," he said grimly. "Have you eaten?"

"Enough to hold me."

"Then we'll get started."

He marched into the office, across the hall from the dining room, went to his oversized chair behind his desk, sat, and got himself adjusted for comfort. Parker took the red leather chair. As I crossed to my desk I started talking, to get the jump on him.

"It will help," I said, not aggressively but pointedly, "if we first get it settled about my leaving that room with my gun there in the drawer. I do not—"

"Shut up!" Wolfe snapped.

"In that case," I demanded, "why didn't you leave me in the coop? I'll go back and—"

"Sit down!"

I sat.

"I deny," he said, "that you were in the slightest degree imprudent. Even if you were, this has transcended such petty considerations." He picked up a sheet of paper from his desk. "This is a letter which came yesterday from a Mrs. E. R. Baumgarten. She wants me to investigate the activities of a nephew who is employed by the business she owns. I wish to reply. Your notebook."

He was using what I call his conclusive tone, leaving no room for questions, let alone argument. I got my notebook and pen.

"Dear Mrs. Baumgarten." He went at it as if he had already composed it in his mind. "Thank you very much for your letter of the thirteenth, requesting me to undertake an investigation for you. Paragraph. I am sorry that I cannot be of service to you. I am compelled to decline because I have been informed by an official of the New York Police Department that my license to operate a private detective agency is about to be taken away from me. Sincerely yours."

Parker ejaculated something and got ignored. I stayed deadpan, but among my emotions was renewed regret that I had missed Wolfe's and Cramer's talk.

Wolfe was saying, "Type it at once and send Fritz to mail it. If any requests for appointments come by telephone refuse them, giving the reason and keeping a record."

"The reason given in the letter?"

"Yes."

I swiveled the typewriter to me, got paper and carbon in, and hit the keys. I had to concentrate. Parker was asking questions, and Wolfe was grunting at him. I finished the letter and envelope, had Wolfe sign it, went to the kitchen and told Fritz to take it to Eighth Avenue immediately, and returned to the office.

"Now," Wolfe said, "I want all of it. Go ahead."

Ordinarily when I start giving Wolfe a full report of an event, no matter how extended and involved, I just glide in and keep going with

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no effort at all, thanks to my long and hard training. That time, having just got a severe jolt, I wasn't so hot at the beginning, since I was supposed to include every word and movement, but by the time I had got to where I opened the window it was coming smooth and easy. As usual, Wolfe soaked it all in without making any interruptions.

It took all of an hour and a half, and then came questions, but not many. I rate a report by the number of questions he has when I'm through, and by that test this was up toward the top. Wolfe leaned back and closed his eyes.

Parker spoke. "It could have been any of them, but it must have been Koven. Or why his string of lies, knowing that you and Goodwin would both contradict him?" The lawyer haw-hawed. "That is, if they're lies—considering your settled policy of telling your counselor only what you think he should know."

"Pfui." Wolfe's eyes came open. "This is extraordinarily intricate, Archie. Have you examined it any?"

"I've started. When I pick at it, it gets worse instead of better."

"Yes. I'm afraid you'll have to type it out. By eleven tomorrow morning?"

"I guess so, but I need a bath first. Anyway, what for? What can we do with it without a license? I suppose it's suspended?"

He ignored it. "What the devil is that smell?" he demanded.

"Disinfectant. It's for the bloodhounds in case you escape." I arose. "I'll go scrub."

"No." He glanced at the wall clock, which said 3:45—fifteen minutes to go until he was due to join Theodore and the orchids up on the roof. "An errand first. I believe it's the *Gazette* that carries the Dazzle Dan comic strip?"

"Yes, sir."

"Daily and Sunday?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want all of them for the past three years. Can you get them?"

"Now?"

"Yes. Wait a minute—confound it, don't be a cyclone! You should hear my instructions for Mr. Parker, but first one for you. Mail Mr. Koven a bill for recovery of his gun—five hundred dollars. It should go today."

"Any extras, under the circumstances?"

"No. Five hundred flat." Wolfe turned to the lawyer. "Mr. Parker, how long will it take to enter a suit for damages and serve a summons on the defendant?"

"That depends." Parker sounded like a lawyer. "If it's rushed all possible and there are no unforeseen obstacles and the defendant is accessible for service, it could be merely a matter of hours."

"By noon tomorrow?"

"Quite possibly, yes."

"Then proceed, please. Mr. Ko-

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ven has destroyed, by slander, my means of livelihood. I wish to bring an action demanding payment by him of the sum of one million dollars."

"M-m-m-m," Parker said. He was frowning.

I addressed Wolfe. "I want to apologize," I told him, "for jumping to a conclusion. I was supposing you had lost control for once and buried it too deep in Cramer. Whereas you did it purposely, getting set for this. I'll be damned."

Wolfe grunted.

"In this sort of thing," Parker said, "it is usual, and desirable, to first send a written request for recompense, by your attorney if you prefer. It looks better."

"I don't care how it looks. I want immediate action."

"Then we'll act." That was one of the reasons Wolfe stuck to Parker; he was no dilly-dallier. "But I must ask, isn't the sum a little flamboyant? A full million?"

"It is not flamboyant. At a hundred thousand a year, a modest expectation, my income would be a million in ten years. A detective license once lost in this fashion is not easily regained."

"All right. A million. I'll need all the facts for drafting a complaint."

"You have them. You've just heard Archie recount them. Must you stickle for more?"

"No. I'll manage." Parker got to his feet. "One thing, though, service of process may be a problem. Policemen may still be around, and even if they aren't I doubt if strangers will be getting into that house tomorrow."

"Archie will send Saul Panzer to you. Saul can get in anywhere and do anything." Wolfe wiggled a finger. "I want Mr. Koven to get that. I want to see him in this room. Five times this morning I tried to get him on the phone, without success. If that doesn't get him I'll devise something that will."

"He'll give it to his attorney."

"Then the attorney will come, and if he's not an imbecile I'll give myself thirty minutes to make him send for his client or go and get him. Well?"

Parker turned and left. I got at the typewriter to make out a bill for half a grand, which seemed like a waste of paper after what I had just heard.

At midnight that Tuesday the office was a sight. It has often been a mess, one way and another, including the time the strangled Cynthia Brown was lying on the floor with her tongue protruding, but this was something new. Dazzle Dan, both black-and-white and color, was all over the place. On account of our shortage in manpower, with me tied up on my typing job, Fritz and Theodore had been drafted for the chore of tearing out the pages and stacking them chronologically, ready for Wolfe to study. With Wolfe's permission, I had bribed

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Lon Cohen of the *Gazette* to have three years of Dazzle Dan assembled and delivered to us, by offering him an exclusive. Naturally he demanded specifications.

"Nothing much," I told him on the phone. "Only that Nero Wolfe is out of the detective business because Inspector Cramer is taking away his license."

"Quite a gag," Lon conceded.

"No gag. Straight."

"You mean it?"

"We're offering it for publication. Exclusive, unless Cramer's office spills it, and I don't think they will."

"The Getz murder?"

"Yes. Only a couple of paragraphs, because details are not yet available, even to you. I'm out on bail."

"I know you are. This is pie. We'll raid the files and get it over there as soon as we can."

He hung up without pressing for details. Of course that meant he would send Dazzle Dan C.O.D., with a reporter. When the reporter arrived a couple of hours later, shortly after Wolfe had come down from the plant rooms at six o'clock, it wasn't just a man with a notebook, it was Lon Cohen himself. He came to the office with me, dumped a big heavy carton on the floor by my desk, removed his coat and dropped it on the carton to show that Dazzle Dan was his property until paid for, and demanded, "I want the works. What Wolfe said and what Cramer said. A picture of Wolfe studying Dazzle Dan—"

I pushed him into a chair, courteously, and gave him all we were ready to turn loose. Naturally that wasn't enough; it never is. I let him fire questions up to a dozen or so, even answering one or two, and then made it clear that was all for now and I had work to do. He admitted it was a bargain, stuck his notebook in his pocket, and got up and picked up his coat.

"If you're not in a hurry, Mr. Cohen," muttered Wolfe, who had left the interview to me.

Lon dropped the coat and sat down. "I have nineteen years, Mr. Wolfe. Before I retire."

"I won't detain you that long." Wolfe sighed. "I am no longer a detective, but I'm a primate and therefore curious. The function of a newspaperman is to satisfy curiosity. Who killed Mr. Getz?"

Lon's brows went up. "Archie Goodwin? It was his gun."

"Nonsense. I'm quite serious. Also I'm discreet. I am excluded from the customary sources of information by the jackassery of Mr. Cramer. I—"

"May I print that?"

"No. None of this. Nor shall I quote you. This is a private conversation. I would like to kow what your colleagues are saying but not printing. Who killed Mr. Getz? Miss Lowell? If so, why?"

Lon pulled his lower lip down and let it up again. "You mean we're just talking."

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"Yes."

"This might possibly lead to another talk that could be printed."

"It might. I make no commitment." Wolfe wasn't eager.

"You wouldn't. As for Miss Lowell, she has not been scratched. It is said that Getz learned she was chiseling on royalties from makers of Dazzle Dan products and intended to hang it on her. That could have been big money."

"Any names or dates?"

"None that are repeatable. By me. Yet."

"Any evidence?"

"I haven't seen any."

Wolfe grunted. "Mr. Hildebrand. If so, why?"

"That's shorter and sadder. He has told friends about it. He has been with Koven for eight years and was told last week he could leave at the end of the month, and he blamed it on Getz. He might or might not get another job at his age."

Wolfe nodded. "Mr. Jordan?"

Lon hesitated. "This I don't like, but others are talking, so why not us? They say Jordan has painted some pictures, modern stuff, and twice he has tried to get a gallery to show them, two different galleries, and both times Getz has somehow kiboshed it. This has names and dates, but whether because Getz was born a louse or whether he wanted to keep Jordan—"

"I'll do my own speculating, thank you. Mr. Getz may not have liked the pictures. Mr. Koven?"

Lon turned a hand over. "Well? What better could you ask? Getz had him buffaloed, no doubt about it. Getz ruled the roost, plenty of evidence on that, and nobody knows why, so the only question is what he had on Koven. It must have been good, but what was it? You say this is a private conversation?"

"Yes."

"Then here's something we got started on just this afternoon. It has to be checked before we print it. That house on Seventy-sixth Street is in Getz's name."

"Indeed." Wolfe shut his eyes and opened them again. "And Mrs. Koven?"

Lon turned his other hand over. "Husband and wife are one, aren't they?"

"Yes. Man and wife make one fool."

Lon's chin jerked up. "I want to print that. Why not?"

"It was printed more than three hundred years ago. Ben Jonson wrote it." Wolfe sighed. "Confound it, what can I do with only a few scraps?" He pointed at the carton. "You want that stuff back, I suppose?"

Lon said he did. He also said he would be glad to go on with the private conversation in the interest of justice and the public welfare, but apparently Wolfe had all the scraps he could use at the moment. After

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ushering Lon to the door I went up to my room to spend an hour attending to purely personal matters, a detail that had been too long postponed. I was out of the shower, selecting a shirt, when a call came from Saul Panzer in response to the message I had left. I gave him all the features of the picture that would help and told him to report to Parker's law office in the morning.

After dinner that evening we were all hard at it in the office. Fritz and Theodore were unfolding *Gazettes,* finding the right page and tearing it out. I was banging away at my machine, three pages an hour. Wolfe was at his desk, concentrating on a methodical and exhaustive study of three years of Dazzle Dan. It was well after midnight when he pushed back his chair, arose, stretched, rubbed his eyes, and told us, "It's bedtime. This morass of fatuity has given me indigestion. Good night."

Wednesday morning he tried to put one over. His routine was breakfast in his room, with the morning paper, at eight; then shaving and dressing; then, from nine to eleven, his morning shift up in the plant rooms. He never went to the office before eleven, and the detective business was never allowed to mingle with the orchids. But that Wednesday he fudged. While I was in the kitchen with Fritz, enjoying griddle cakes, Darst's sausage, honey, and plenty of coffee, and going through the morning papers, with two readings for the *Gazette's* account of Wolfe's enforced retirement, Wolfe sneaked downstairs into the office and made off with a stack of Dazzle Dan.

The way I knew, before breakfast I had gone in there to straighten up a little, and I am trained to observe. Returning after breakfast, and glancing around before starting at my typewriter, I saw that half of a pile of Dan was gone. I don't think I had ever seen him quite so hot under the collar. I admit I fully approved. Not only did I not make an excuse for a trip up to the roof to catch him at it, but I even took the trouble to be out of the office when he came down at eleven o'clock, to give him a chance to get Dan back unseen.

My first job after breakfast had been to carry out some instructions Wolfe had given me the evening before. Manhattan office hours being what they are, I got no answer at the number of Levay Recorders, Inc., until 9:35. Then it took some talking to get a promise of immediate action, and if it hadn't been for the name of Nero Wolfe I wouldn't have made it. But I got both the promise and the action. A little after ten, two men arrived with cartons of equipment and tool kits, and in less than an hour they were through and gone, and it was a neat and nifty job. It would have taken an expert search to reveal anything suspicious in the office, and the wire

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to the kitchen, running around the baseboard and on through, wouldn't be suspicious even if seen.

It was hard going at the typewriter on account of the phone ringing, chiefly reporters wanting to talk to Wolfe, and finally I had to ask Fritz in to answer the damn thing and give everybody a brush-off. A call he switched to me was one from the D.A.'s office. They had the nerve to ask me to come down there so they could ask me something. I told them I was busy answering Help Wanted ads and couldn't spare the time.

Half an hour later Fritz switched another one to me. It was Sergeant Purley Stebbins. He was good and sore, beefing about Wolfe having no authority to break the news about losing his license, and it wasn't official yet, and where did I think it would get me refusing to cooperate with the D.A. on a murder when I had discovered the body, and I could have my choice of coming down quick or having a P.D. car come and get me. I let him use up his breath.

"Listen, brother," I told him, "I hadn't heard that the name of this city has been changed to Moscow. If Mr. Wolfe wants to publish it that he's out of business, hoping that someone will pass the hat or offer him a job as doorman, that's his affair. As for my cooperating, nuts. You have already got me sewed up on two charges, and on advice of counsel and my doctor I am staying home, taking aspirin and gargling with prune juice and gin. If you come here, you won't get in without a search warrant. If you come with another warrant for me, say for cruelty to animals because I opened that window, you can either wait on the stoop until I emerge or shoot the door down, whichever you prefer. I am now hanging up."

"If you'll listen a minute, damn it."

"Goodbye, you double-breasted nitwit."

I cradled the phone, sat thirty seconds to calm down, and resumed at the typewriter. The next interruption came not from the outside but from Wolfe, a little before noon. He was back at his desk, analyzing Dazzle Dan. Suddenly he pronounced my name, and I swiveled.

"Yes, sir."

"Look at this."

He slid a sheet of the *Gazette* across his desk, and I got up and took it. It was a Sunday half page, in color, from four months back. In the first frame Dazzle Dan was scooting along a country road on a motorcycle, passing a roadside sign that read:

PEACHES RIGHT FROM THE TREE!
AGGIE GHOOL AND HAGGIE KROOL

In frame two D.D. had stopped his bike alongside a peach tree full of red and yellow fruit. Standing there were two females, presumably Aggie Ghool and Haggie Krool.

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One was old and bent, dressed in burlap as near as I could tell; the other was young and pink-cheeked, wearing a mink coat. If you say surely not a mink coat, I say I'm telling what I saw. D.D. was saying, in his balloon, "Gimme a dozen."

Frame three: the young female was handing D.D. the peaches, and the old one was extending her hand for payment. Frame four: the old one was giving D.D. his change from a bill. Frame five: the old one was handing the young one a coin and saying, "Here's your ten per cent, Haggie," and the young one was saying, "Thank you very much, Aggie." Frame six: D.D. was asking Aggie, "Why don't you split it even?" and Aggie was telling him, "Because it's my tree." Frame seven: D.D. was off again on the bike, but I felt I had had enough and looked at Wolfe inquiringly.

"Am I supposed to comment?"

"If it would help, yes."

"I pass. If it's a feed from the National Industrialists' League it's the wrong angle. If you mean the mink coat, Pat Lowell's may not be paid for."

He grunted. "There have been two similar episodes, one each year, with the same characters."

"Then it may be paid for."

"Is that all?"

"It's all for now. I'm not a brain, I'm a typist. I've got to finish this damn report."

I tossed the art back to him and returned to work.

At 12:28 I handed him the finished report, and he dropped D.D. and started on it. I went to the kitchen to tell Fritz I would take on the phone again, and as I re-entered the office it was ringing. I crossed to my desk and got it. My daytime formula was, "Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking," but with our license gone it was presumably illegal to have an office, so I said, "Nero Wolfe's residence, Archie Goodwin speaking," and heard Saul Panzer's husky voice.

"Reporting in, Archie. No trouble at all. Koven is served. Put it in his hand five minutes ago."

"In the house?"

"Yes. I'll call Parker—"

"How did you get in?"

"Oh, simple. The man that delivers stuff from that Furnari's you told me about has got the itch bad, and it only took ten bucks. Of course after I got inside I had to use my head and legs both, but with your sketch of the layout it was a cinch."

"For you, yes. Mr. Wolfe says satisfactory, which as you know is as far as he ever goes. I say you show promise. You'll call Parker?"

"Yes. I have to go there to sign a paper."

"Okay. Be seeing you."

I hung up and told Wolfe. He lifted his eyes, said, "Ah!" and returned to my report.

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After lunch there was an important chore, involving Wolfe, me, our memory of the talk Saturday evening with Koven, and the equipment that had been installed by Levay Recorders, Inc. We spent nearly an hour at it, with three separate tries, before we got it done to Wolfe's satisfaction.

After that it dragged along. The phone calls had fallen off. Wolfe, at his desk, finished with the report, put it in a drawer, leaned back, and closed his eyes. I would just as soon have opened a conversation, but pretty soon his lips started working—pushing out, drawing back, and pushing out again—and I knew his brain was busy, so I went to the cabinet for a batch of the germination records and settled down to making entries. He didn't need a license to go on growing orchids, though the question would soon arise of how to pay the bills.

At four o'clock he left to go up to the plant rooms, and I went on with the records. During the next two hours there were a few phone calls, but none from Koven or his lawyer or Parker. At two minutes past six I was telling myself that Koven was probably drinking himself up to something when two things happened at once: the sound came from the hall of Wolfe's elevator jerking to a stop, and the doorbell rang.

I went to the hall, switched on the stoop light, and took a look through the panel of one-way glass in the front door. It was a mink coat all right, but the hat was different. I marched to the office door and announced, "Miss Patricia Lowell. Will she do?"

He made a face. He seldom welcomes a man crossing his threshold; he never welcomes a woman. "Let her in," he muttered.

I stepped to the front, slid the bolt off, and opened up. "This is the kind of surprise I like," I said heartily. She entered, and I shut the door and bolted it. "Couldn't you find a coconut?"

"I want to see Nero Wolfe," she said in a voice so hard that it was out of character, considering her pink cheeks.

"Sure. This way." I ushered her down the hall and on in. Once in a while Wolfe rises when a woman enters his office, but this time he kept not only his chair but also his tongue. He inclined his head a quarter of an inch when I pronounced her name, but said nothing. I gave her the red leather chair, helped her throw her coat back, and went to my desk.

"So you're Nero Wolfe," she said.

That called for no comment and got none.

"I'm scared to death," she said.

"You don't look it," Wolfe growled.

"I hope I don't; I'm trying not to." She started to put her bag on the little table at her elbow, changed her mind, and kept it in

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her lap. She took off a glove. "I was sent here by Mr. Koven."

No comment. We were looking at her. She looked at me, then back at Wolfe, and protested, "My God, don't you ever say anything?"

"Only on occasion." Wolfe leaned back. "Give me one."

She compressed her lips. "Mr. Koven sent me," she said, "about the ridiculous suit for damages you have brought. He intends to enter a counterclaim for damage to his reputation through actions of your acknowledged agent, Archie Goodwin. Of coure he denies that there is any basis for your suit."

She stopped. Wolfe met her gaze and kept his trap shut.

"That's the situation," she said belligerently.

"Thank you for coming to tell me," Wolfe murmured. "If you'll show Miss Lowell the way out, please, Archie?"

I stood up. She looked at me as if I had offered her a deadly insult, and looked back at Wolfe. "I don't think," she said, "that your attitude is very sensible. I think you and Mr. Koven should come to an agreement on this. Why wouldn't this be the way to do it—say the claims cancel each other, and you abandon yours and he abandons his?"

"Because," Wolfe said dryly, "my claim is valid and his isn't. If you're a member of the bar, Miss Lowell, you should know that this is a little improper, or anyway unconventional. You should be talking with my attorney, not with me."

"I'm not a lawyer, Mr. Wolfe. I'm Mr. Koven's agent and business manager. He thinks lawyers would just make this more of a mess than it is, and I agree with him. He thinks you and he should settle it between you. Isn't that possible?"

"I don't know. We can try. There's a phone. Get him down here."

She shook her head. "He's too upset. I'm sure you'll find it more practical to deal with me, and if we come to an understanding he'll approve, I guarantee that. Why don't we go into it—the two claims?"

"I doubt if it will get us anywhere. For one thing, a factor in both claims is the question who killed Adrian Getz, and why? If it was Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Koven's claim has a footing, and I freely concede it; if it was someone else I concede nothing. If I discussed it with you I would have to begin by considering that aspect; I would have to ask you some pointed questions; and I doubt if you would dare to risk answering them."

"I can always button up. What kind of questions?"

"Well—" Wolfe pursed his lips. "For example, how's the monkey?"

"I can risk answering that. It's sick. It's at the Speyer Hospital. They don't expect it to live."

"Exposure from the open window?"

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"Yes. They're very delicate, that kind."

Wolfe nodded. "That table over there by the globe—that pile of stuff on it is Dazzle Dan for the past three years. I've been looking through it. Last August and September a monkey had a prominent role. It was drawn by two different persons, or at least with two different conceptions. In its first seventeen appearances it was depicted maliciously—on a conjecture, by someone with a distaste for monkeys. Thereafter it was drawn sympathetically and humorously. The change was abrupt and noticeable. Why? On instructions from Mr. Koven?"

Pat Lowell was frowning. Her lips parted and went together again.

"You have four choices," Wolfe said bluntly. "The truth, a lie, evasion, or refusal to answer. Either of the last two would make me curious, and I would get my curiosity satisfied somehow. If you try a lie it may work, but I'm an expert on lies and liars."

"There's nothing to lie about. I was thinking back. Mr. Getz objected to the way the monkey was drawn, and Mr. Koven had Mr. Jordan do it instead of Mr. Hildebrand."

"Mr. Jordan likes monkeys?"

"He likes animals. He said the monkey looked like Napoleon."

"Mr. Hildebrand does not like monkeys?"

"He didn't like that one. Rookaloo knew it, of course, and bit him once. Isn't this pretty silly, Mr. Wolfe? Are you going on with this?"

"Unless you walk out, yes. I'm investigating Mr. Koven's counterclaim, and this is how I do it. With any question you have your four choices—and a fifth too, of course: get up and go. How did you feel about the monkey?"

"I thought it was an awful nuisance, but it had its points as a diversion. It was my fault it was there, since I gave it to Mr. Getz."

"Indeed. When?"

"About a year ago. A friend returning from South America gave it to me, and I couldn't take care of it, so I gave it to him."

"Mr. Getz lived at the Koven house?"

"Yes."

"Then actually you were dumping it onto Mrs. Koven. Did she appreciate it?"

"She has never said so. I didn't—I know I should have considered that. I apologized to her, and she was nice about it."

"Did Mr. Koven like the monkey?"

"He liked to tease it. But he didn't dislike it; he teased it just to annoy Mr. Getz."

Wolfe leaned back and clasped his hands behind his head. "You know, Miss Lowell, I did not find the Dazzle Dan saga hopelessly inane. There is a sustained sardon-

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ic tone, some fertility of invention, and even an occasional touch of imagination. Monday evening, while Mr. Goodwin was in jail, I telephoned a couple of people who are supposed to know things and was referred by them to others. I was told that it is generally believed, though not published, that the conception of Dazzle Dan was originally supplied to Mr. Koven by Mr. Getz, that Mr. Getz was the continuing source of inspiration for the story and pictures, and that without him Mr. Koven will be up a stump. What about it?"

Pat Lowell had stiffened. "Talk." She was scornful. "Just cheap talk."

"You should know." Wolfe sounded relieved. "If that belief could be validated I admit I would be up a stump myself. To support my claim against Mr. Koven, and to discredit his against me, I need to demonstrate that Mr. Goodwin did not kill Mr. Getz, either accidentally or otherwise. If he didn't, then who did? One of you five. But all of you had a direct personal interest in the continued success of Dazzle Dan, sharing as you did in the prodigious proceeds; and if Mr. Getz was responsible for the success, why kill him?" Wolfe chuckled. "So you see I'm not silly at all. We've been at it only twenty minutes, and already you've helped me enormously. Give us another four or five hours, and we'll see. By the way."

He leaned forward to press a button at the edge of his desk, and in a moment Fritz appeared.

"There'll be a guest for dinner, Fritz."

"Yes, sir." Fritz went.

"Four or five hours?" Pat Lowell demanded.

"At least that. With a recess for dinner; I banish business from the table. Half for me and half for you. This affair is extremely complicated, and if you came here to get an agreement we'll have to cover it all. Let's see, where were we?"

She regarded him. "About Getz, I didn't say he had nothing to do with the success of Dazzle Dan. After all, so do I. I didn't say he won't be a loss. Everyone knows he was Mr. Koven's oldest and closest friend. We were all quite aware that Mr. Koven relied on him—"

Wolfe showed her a palm. "Please, Miss Lowell, don't spoil it for me. Don't give me a point and then try to snatch it back. Next you'll be saying that Koven called Getz 'the Squirt' to show his affection, as a man will call his dearest friend an old bastard, whereas I prefer to regard it as an inferiority complex, deeply resentful, showing its biceps. Or telling me that all of you, without exception, were inordinately fond of Mr. Getz and submissively grateful to him. Don't forget that Mr. Goodwin spent hours in that house among you and has fully reported to me; also you should know that I had a talk with Inspector Cramer on Monday

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evening and learned from him some of the plain facts, such as the pillow lying on the floor, scorched and pierced, showing that it had been used to muffle the sound of the shot, and the failure of all of you to prove lack of opportunity."

Wolfe kept going. "But if you insist on minimizing Koven's dependence as a fact, let me assume it as a hypothesis in order to put a question. Say that Koven felt strongly about his debt to Getz and his reliance on him, that he proposed to do something about it, and that he found it necessary to confide in one of you people, to get help or advice. Which of you would he have come to? We must of course put his wife first, ex officio and to sustain convention—and anyway, out of courtesy I must suppose you incapable of revealing your employer's conjugal privities. Which of you three would he have come to—Mr. Hildebrand, Mr. Jordan, or you?"

Miss Lowell was wary. "On your hypothesis, you mean."

"Yes."

"None of us."

"But if he felt he had to?"

"Not with anything as intimate as that. He wouldn't have let himself have to. None of us three has ever got within miles of him on anything really personal."

"Surely he confides in you, his agent and manager?"

"On business matters, yes. Not on personal things."

"Why were all of you so concerned about the gun in his desk?"

"We weren't concerned, not *really* concerned—at least I wasn't. I just didn't like it's being there, loaded, so easy to get at, and I knew he didn't have a license for it."

Wolfe kept on about the gun for a good ten minutes—how often had she seen it, had she ever picked it up, and so forth, with special emphasis on Sunday morning, when she and Hildebrand had opened the drawer and looked at it. On that detail she corroborated Hildebrand as I had heard him tell it to Cramer. Finally she balked. She said they weren't getting anywhere, and she certainly wasn't going to stay for dinner if afterward it was only going to be more of the same.

Wolfe nodded in agreement. "You're quite right," he told her. "We've gone as far as we can, you and I. We need all of them. It's time for you to call Mr. Koven and tell him so. Tell him to be here at eight thirty with Mrs. Koven, Mr. Jordan, and Mr. Hildebrand."

She was staring at him. "Are you trying to be funny?" she demanded.

He skipped it. "I don't know," he said, "whether you can handle it properly; if not, I'll talk to him. The validity of my claim, and of his, depends primarily on who killed Mr. Getz. I now know who killed him. I'll have to tell the police but first I want to settle the matter of my claim with Mr. Koven. Tell him

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that. Tell him that if I have to inform the police before I have a talk with him and the others there will be no compromise on my claim, and I'll collect it."

"This is a bluff."

"Then call it."

"I'm going to." She left the chair and got the coat around her. Her eyes blazed at him. "I'm not such a sap!" She started for the door.

"Get Inspector Cramer, Archie!" Wolfe snapped. He called, "They'll be there by the time you are!"

I lifted the phone and dialed. She was out in the hall, but I heard neither footsteps nor the door opening.

"Hello," I told the transmitter, loud enough. "Manhattan Homicide West? Inspector Cramer, please. This is—"

A hand darted past me, and a finger pressed the button down, and a mink coat dropped to the floor. "Damn you!" she said, hard and cold, but the hand was shaking so that the finger slipped off the button. I cradled the phone.

"Get Mr. Koven's number for her, Archie," Wolfe purred.

At twenty minutes to nine Wolfe's eyes moved slowly from left to right, to take in the faces of our assembled visitors. He was in a nasty humor. He hated to work right after dinner, and from the way he kept his chin down and a slight twitch of a muscle in his cheek I knew it was going to be real work. Whether he had got them there with a bluff or not, it would take more than a bluff to rake in the pot he was after now.

Pat Lowell had not dined with us. Not only had she declined to come along to the dining room, she had also left untouched the tray which Fritz had taken to her in the office. Of course that got Wolfe's goat and probably got some pointed remarks from him, but I wasn't there to hear them because I had gone to the kitchen to check with Fritz on the operation of the installation made by Levay Recorders, Inc. That was the one part of the program that I clearly understood. I was still in the kitchen, rehearsing with Fritz, when the doorbell rang and I went to the front and found them there in a body. They got better hall service than I had got at their place, and also better chair service in the office.

When they were seated Wolfe took them in from left to right—Harry Koven in the red leather chair, then his wife, then Pat Lowell, and, after a gap, Pete Jordan and Byram Hildebrand over toward me. I don't know what impression Wolfe got from his survey, but from where I sat it looked as if he was up against a united front.

"This time," Koven blurted, "you can't cook up a fancy lie with Goodwin. There are witnesses."

He was keyed up. I would have said he had had six drinks, maybe more.

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"We won't get anywhere that way, Mr. Koven," Wolfe objected. "We're all tangled up, and it will take more than blather to get us loose. You don't want to pay me a million dollars. I don't want to lose my license. The police don't want to add another unsolved murder to the long list. The central and dominant factor is the violent death of Mr. Getz, and I propose to deal with that if we can get settled—"

"You told Miss Lowell you know who killed him. If so, why don't you tell the police?"

Wolfe's eyes narrowed. "You don't mean that, Mr. Koven—"

"You're damn right I mean it!"

"Then there's a misunderstanding. I heard Miss Lowell's talk with you on the phone, both ends of it. I got the impression that my threat to inform the police about Mr. Getz's death was what brought you down here. Now you seem—"

"It wasn't any threat that brought me here! It's that blackmailing suit you started! I want to make you eat it and I'm going to!"

"Indeed. Then I gather that you don't care who gets my information first, you or the police. But I do. For one thing, when I talk to the police I like to be able—"

The doorbell rang. When visitors were present Fritz usually answered the door, but he had orders to stick to his post in the kitchen, so I got up and went to the hall and switched on the stoop light for a look through the one-way glass. One glance was enough. Stepping back into the office, I stood until Wolfe caught my eye.

"The man about the chair," I told him.

He frowned. "Tell him I'm—" He stopped, and the frown cleared. "No. I'll see him. If you'll excuse me a moment?" He pushed his chair back, made it to his feet, and detoured around Koven. I let him precede me into the hall and closed that door before joining him. He strode to the front, peered through the glass, and opened the door. The chain bolt stopped it at a crack of two inches.

Wolfe spoke through the crack. "Well, sir?"

Inspector Cramer's voice was anything but friendly. "I'm coming in."

"I doubt it. What for?"

"Patricia Lowell entered here at six o'clock and is still here. The other four entered fifteen minutes ago. I told you Monday evening to lay off. I told you your license was suspended, and here you are with your office full. I'm coming in."

"I still doubt it. I have no client. My job for Mr. Koven, which you know about, has been finished, and I have sent him a bill. These people are here to discuss an action for damages which I have brought against Mr. Koven. I don't need a license for that. I'm shutting the door."

He tried to, but it didn't budge.

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I could see the tip of Cramer's toe at the bottom of the crack.

"By God, this does it," Cramer said savagely. "You're through."

"I thought I was already through. But this—"

"I can't hear you! The wind."

"This is preposterous, talking through a crack. Descend to the sidewalk, and I'll come out. Did you hear that?"

"Yes."

"Very well. To the sidewalk."

Wolfe marched to the big old walnut rack and reached for his overcoat. After I had held it for him and handed him his hat, I got my coat and slipped into it and then took a look through the glass. The stoop was empty. A burly figure was at the bottom of the steps. I unbolted the door and opened it, followed Wolfe over the sill, pulled the door shut, and made sure it was locked. A gust of wind pounced on us, slashing at us with sleet. I wanted to take Wolfe's elbow as we went down the steps, thinking where it would leave me if he fell and cracked his skull, but knew I hadn't better.

He made it safely, got his back to the sleety wind, which meant that Cramer had to face it, and raised his voice. "I don't like fighting a blizzard, so let's get to the point. You don't want these people talking with me, but there's nothing you can do about it. You have blundered and you know it. You arrested Mr. Goodwin on a trumpery charge. You came and blustered me and went too far. Now you're afraid I'm going to explode Mr. Koven's lies. More, you're afraid I'm going to catch a murderer and toss him to the District Attorney. So you —"

"I'm not afraid of a damn thing." Cramer was squinting to protect his eyes from the cutting sleet. "I told you to lay off, and by God you're going to. Your suit against Koven is a phony."

"It isn't, but let's stick to the point. I'm uncomfortable. I am not an outdoors man. You want to enter my house. You may, under a condition. The five callers are in my office. There is a hole in the wall, concealed from view in the office by what is apparently a picture. Standing, or on a stool, in a nook at the end of the hall, you can see and hear us in the office. The condition is that you enter quietly —confound it!"

The wind had taken his hat. I made a quick dive and stab but missed, and away it went. He had only had it fourteen years.

"The condition," he repeated, "is that you enter quietly, take your post in the nook, oversee us from there, and give me half an hour. Thereafter you will be free to join us if you think you should. I warn you not to be impetuous. Up to a certain point your presence would make it harder for me, if not impossible, and I doubt if you'll know when that point is reached. I'm af-

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ter a murderer, and there's one chance in five, I should say, that I'll get him. I want—"

"I thought you said you were discussing an action for damages."

"We are. I'll get either the murderer or the damages. Do you want to harp on that?"

"No."

"You've cooled off, and no wonder, in this hurricane. My hair will go next. I'm going in. If you come along it must be under the condition as stated. Are you coming?"

"Yes."

Wolfe headed for the steps. I passed him to go ahead and unlock the door. When they were inside I closed it and put the bolt back on. They hung up their coats, and Wolfe took Cramer down the hall and around the corner to the nook. I brought a stool from the kitchen, but Cramer shook his head. Wolfe slid the panel aside, making no sound, looked through, and nodded to Cramer. Cramer took a look and nodded back, and we left him. At the door to the office Wolfe muttered about his hair, and I let him use my pocket comb.

From the way they looked at us as we entered you might have thought they suspected we had been in the cellar fusing a bomb, but one more suspicion wouldn't make it any harder. I circled to my desk and sat. Wolfe got himself back in place, took a deep breath, and passed his eyes over them.

"I'm sorry," he said politely, "but that was unavoidable. Suppose we start over"—he looked at Koven—"say, with your surmise to the police that Getz was shot by Mr. Goodwin accidentally in a scuffle. That's absurd. Getz was shot with a cartridge that had been taken from your gun and put into Goodwin's gun. Manifestly Goodwin couldn't have done that, since when he first saw your gun Getz was already dead. Therefore—"

"That's not true!" Koven cut in. "He had seen it before, when he came to my office. He could have gone back later and got the cartridges."

Wolfe glared at him in astonishment. "Do you really dare, sir, in front of me, to my face, to cling to that fantastic tale you told the police? That rigmarole?"

"You're damn right I do!"

"Pfui." Wolfe was disgusted. "I had hoped, here together, we were prepared to get down to reality. It would have been better to adopt your suggestion to take my information to the police. Perhaps—"

"I made no such suggestion!"

"In this room, Mr. Koven, some fifteen minutes ago?"

"No!"

Wolfe made a face. "I see," he said quietly. "It's impossible to get on solid ground with a man like you, but I still have to try. Archie, bring the tape from the kitchen, please?"

I went. I didn't like it. I thought he was rushing it. Granting that he

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had been jostled off his stride by Cramer's arrival, I felt that it was far from one of his best performances, and this looked like a situation where nothing less than his best would do. So I went to the kitchen, passing Cramer in his nook without a glance, told Fritz to stop the machine and wind, and stood and scowled at it turning. When it stopped I removed the wheel and slipped it into a carton and, carton in hand, returned to the office.

"We're waiting," Wolfe said curtly.

That hurried me. There was a stack of similar cartons on my desk, and in my haste I knocked them over as I was putting down the one I had brought. It was embarrassing with all eyes on me, and I gave them a cold look as I crossed to the cabinet to get the player. It needed a whole corner of my desk, and I had to shove the tumbled cartons aside to make room. Finally, I had the player in position and connected, and the wheel of tape, taken from the carton, in place.

"All right?" I asked Wolfe.

"Go ahead."

I flipped the switch. There was a crackle and a little spitting, and then Wolfe's voice came:

"It's not that, Mr. Koven, not at all. I doubt if it's worth it to you, considering the size of my minimum fee, to hire me for anything so trivial as finding a stolen gun, or even discovering the thief. I should think—"

"No!" Wolfe bellowed.

I switched it off. I was flustered. "Excuse it," I said. "The wrong tape."

"Must I do it myself?" Wolfe asked sarcastically.

I muttered something, turning the wheel to rewind. I removed it, pawed among the cartons, picked one, took out the wheel, put it on, and turned the switch. This time the voice that came on was not Wolfe's but Koven's—loud and clear.

"This time you can't cook up a fancy lie with Goodwin. There are witnesses."

Then Wolfe's: *"We won't get anywhere that way, Mr. Koven. We're all tangled up, and it will take more than blather to get us loose. You don't want to pay me a million dollars. I don't want to lose my license. The police don't want to add another unsolved murder to the long list. The central and dominant factor is the violent death of Mr. Getz, and I propose to deal with that if we can get settled—"*

Koven's: *"You told Miss Lowell you know who killed him. If so, why don't you tell the police?"*

Wolfe: *"You don't mean that, Mr. Koven—"*

Koven: *"You're damn right I mean it!"*

Wolfe: *"Then there's a misunderstanding. I heard Miss Lowell's talk with you on the phone, both ends of it. I got the impression that my threat to inform the police—"*

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"That's enough!" Wolfe called. I turned it off. Wolfe looked at Koven. "I would call that," he said dryly, "a suggestion that I take my information to the police. Wouldn't you?"

Koven wasn't saying. Wolfe's eyes moved. "Wouldn't you, Miss Lowell?"

She shook her head. "I'm not an expert on suggestions."

Wolfe left her. "We won't quarrel over terms, Mr. Koven. You heard it. Incidentally, about the other tape you heard the start of through Mr. Goodwin's clumsiness, you may wonder why I haven't given it to the police to refute you. Monday evening, when Inspector Cramer came to see me, I still considered you as my client and I didn't want to discomfit you until I heard what you had to say. Before Mr. Cramer left he had made himself so offensive that I was disinclined to tell him anything whatever. Now you are no longer my client. We'll discuss this matter realistically or not at all. I don't care to badger you into an explicit statement that you lied to the police; I'll leave that to you and them; I merely insist that we proceed on the basis of what we both know to be the truth. With that understood—"

"Wait a minute," Pat Lowell put in. "The gun was in the drawer Sunday morning. I saw it."

"I know you did. That's one of the knots in the tangle, and we'll come to it." His eyes swept the arc. "We want to know who killed Adrian Getz. Let's get at it. What do we know about him or her? We know a lot.

"First, he took Koven's gun from the drawer sometime previous to last Friday and kept it somewhere. For that gun was put back in the drawer when Goodwin's was removed shortly before Getz was killed, and cartridges from it were placed in Goodwin's gun.

"Second, the thought of Getz continuing to live was for some reason so repugnant to the murderer as to be intolerable.

"Third, he knew the purpose of Koven's visit here Saturday evening, and of Goodwin's errand at the Koven house on Monday, and he knew the details of the procedure planned by Koven and Goodwin. Only with—"

"I don't know them even yet," Hildebrand squeaked.

"Neither do I," Pete Jordan declared.

"The innocent can afford ignorance," Wolfe told them. "Enjoy it if you have it. Only with that knowledge could he have devised his intricate scheme and carried it out.

"Fourth, his mental processes are devious but defective. His deliberate and spectacular plan to make it appear that Goodwin had killed Getz, while ingenious in some respects, was in others witless. Going to Koven's office to get Goodwin's gun from the drawer and placing

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Koven's gun there, transferring the cartridges from Koven's gun to Goodwin's, proceeding to the room below to find Getz asleep, shooting him in the head, using a pillow to muffle the sound—all that was well enough, competently conceived and executed, but then what? Wanting to make sure that the gun would be quickly found on the spot, a quite unnecessary precaution, he slipped it into the monkey's cage. That was probably improvisation and utterly brainless. Mr. Goodwin couldn't possibly be such a vapid fool.

"Fifth, he hated the monkey deeply and bitterly, either on its own account or because of its association with Getz. Having just killed a man, and needing to leave the spot with all possible speed, he went and opened a window, from only one conceivable motive. That took a peculiar, indeed an unexampled, malevolence. I admit it was effective. Miss Lowell tells me the monkey is dying.

"Sixth, he placed Koven's gun in the drawer Sunday morning and, after it had been seen there, took it out again. That was the most remarkable stratagem of all. Since there was no point in putting it there unless it was to be seen, he arranged that it should be seen. Why? It could only have been that he already knew what was to happen on Monday when Mr. Goodwin came, he had already conceived his scheme for framing Goodwin for the homicide, and he thought he was arranging in advance to discredit Goodwin's story. So he not only put the gun in the drawer Sunday morning, he also made sure its presence would be noted—and not, of course, by Mr. Koven."

Wolfe focused on one of them. "You saw the gun in the drawer Sunday morning, Mr. Hildebrand?"

"Yes." The squeak was off pitch. "But I didn't put it there!"

"I didn't say you did. Your claim to innocence has not yet been challenged. You were in the workroom, went up to consult Mr. Koven, encountered Mrs. Koven one flight up, were told by her that Mr. Koven was still in bed, ascended to the office, found Miss Lowell there, and you pulled the drawer open and both of you saw the gun there. Is that correct?"

"I didn't go up there to look in that drawer. We just—"

"Stop meeting accusations that haven't been made. It's a bad habit. Had you been upstairs earlier that morning?"

"No!"

"Had he, Miss Lowell?"

"Not that I know of." She spoke slowly, with a drag, as if she had only so many words and had to count them. "Our looking into the drawer was only incidental."

"Had he, Mrs. Koven?"

The wife jerked her head up. "Had he what?" she demanded.

"Had Mr. Hildebrand been upstairs earlier that morning?"

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She looked bewildered. "Earlier than what?"

"You met him in the second-floor hall and told him that your husband was still in bed and that Miss Lowell was up in the office. Had he been upstairs before that? That morning?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Then you don't say that he had been?"

"I know nothing about it."

"There's nothing as safe as ignorance—or as dangerous." Wolfe spread his gaze again. "To complete the list of what we know about the murderer. Seventh and last, his repugnance to Getz was so extreme that he even scorned the risk that by killing Getz he might be killing Dazzle Dan. How essential Getz was to Dazzle Dan—"

"*I* make Dazzle Dan!" Harry Koven roared. "Dazzle Dan is mine!" He was glaring at everybody. "*I* am Dazzle Dan!"

"For God's sake shut up, Harry!" Pat Lowell said sharply.

Koven's chin was quivering. He needed three quick drinks.

"I was saying," Wolfe went on, "that I do not know how essential Getz was to Dazzle Dan. The testimony conflicts. In any case the murderer wanted him dead. I've identified the murderer for you by now, surely?"

"You have not," Pat Lowell said aggressively.

"Then I'll specify." Wolfe leaned forward at them. "But first let me say a word for the police, particularly Mr. Cramer. He is quite capable of unraveling a tangle like this, with its superficial complexities. What flummoxed him was Mr. Koven's elaborate lie, apparently corroborated by Miss Lowell and Mr. Hildebrand. If he had had the gumption to proceed on the assumption that Mr. Goodwin and I were telling the truth and all of it, he would have found it simple. This should be a lesson to him."

Wolfe considered a moment. "It might be better to specify by elimination. If you recall my list of seven facts about the murderer, that is child's play. Mr. Jordan, for instance, is eliminated by Number Six; he wasn't there Sunday morning. Mr. Hildebrand is eliminated by three or four of them, especially Number Six again; he had made no earlier trip upstairs. Miss Lowell is eliminated, for me, by Numbers Four and Five; and I am convinced that none of the three I have named can meet the requirements of Number Three. I do not believe that Mr. Koven would have confided in any of them so intimately. Nor do I—"

"Hold it!" The gruff voice came from the doorway.

Heads jerked around. Cramer advanced and stopped at Koven's left, between him and his wife. There was dead silence. Koven had his neck twisted to stare up at Cramer, then suddenly he fell apart and buried his face in his hands.

Cramer, scowling at Wolfe, boil-

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ing with rage, spoke. "Damn you, if you had given it to us! You and your numbers game!"

"I can't give you what you won't take," Wolfe said bitingly. "You can have her now. Do you want more help? Mr. Koven was still in bed Sunday morning when two of them saw the gun in the drawer. More? Spend the night interrogating Mr. Hildebrand; I'll stake my license against your badge that he'll remember that when he spoke with Mrs. Koven in the hall she said something that caused him to open the drawer and look at the gun. Still more? Take all the contents of her room to your laboratory. She must have hid the gun among her intimate things, and you should find evidence. You can't put him on the stand and ask him if and when he told her what he was doing; he can't testify against his wife; but surely—"

Mrs. Koven stood up. She was pale but under control, perfectly steady. She looked down at the back of her husband's bent head.

"Take me home, Harry," she said.

Cramer, in one short step, was at her elbow.

"Harry!" she said, softly insistent. "Take me home."

His head lifted and turned to look at her. I couldn't see his face. "Sit down, Marcy," he said. "I'll handle this." He looked at Wolfe. "If you've got a record of what I said here Saturday, all right. I lied to the cops. So what? I didn't want to—"

"Be quiet, Harry," Pat Lowell blurted at him. "Get a lawyer and let him talk. Don't say anything."

Wolfe nodded. "That's good advice. Especially, Mr. Koven, since I hadn't quite finished. It is a matter of record that Mr. Getz not only owned the house you live in but also that he owned Dazzle Dan and permitted you to take only ten per cent of the proceeds."

Mrs. Koven dropped back into the chair and froze, staring at him. Wolfe spoke to her. "I suppose, madam, that after you killed him you went to his room to look for documents and possibly found some and destroyed them. That must have been part of your plan last week when you first took the gun from the drawer—to destroy all evidence of his ownership of Dazzle Dan after killing him. That was foolish, since a man like Mr. Getz would surely not leave invaluable papers in so accessible a spot, and they will certainly be found; we can leave that to Mr. Cramer. When I said it is a matter of record, I meant a record that I have inspected and have in my possession."

Wolfe pointed. "That stack of stuff on that table is Dazzle Dan for the past three years. In one episode, repeated annually with variations, he buys peaches from two characters named Aggie Ghool and Haggie Krool, and Aggie Ghool, saying that she owns the tree, gives

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Haggie Krool ten per cent of the amount received and pockets the rest. A.G. are the initials of Adrian Getz; H.K. are the initials of Harry Koven. It is not credible that that is coincidence or merely a prank, especially since the episode was repeated annually. Mr. Getz must have had a singularly contorted psyche, taking delight as he did in hiding the fact of his ownership and control of that monster, but compelling the nominal owner to publish it each year in a childish allegory. For a meager ten per cent of the—"

"Not of the net," Koven objected. "Ten per cent of the gross. Over four hundred a week clear, and I—"

He stopped. His wife had said, "You worm." Leaving her chair, she stood looking down at him, stiff and towering, overwhelming, small as she was.

"You worm!" she said in bitter contempt. "Not even a worm. Worms have guts, don't they?"

She whirled to face Wolfe. "All right, you've got him. The one time he ever acted like a man, and he didn't have the guts to see it through. Getz owned Dazzle Dan, that's right. When he got the idea and sold it, years ago, and took Harry in to draw it and front it, Harry should have insisted on an even split right then and didn't. He never had it in him to insist on anything, and never would, and Getz knew it. When Dazzle Dan caught on, and the years went by and it kept getting bigger and bigger, Getz didn't mind Harry having the name and the fame as long as he owned it and got the money. You said he had a contorted psyche; maybe that was it, only that's not what I'd call it. Getz was a vampire."

"I'll accept that," Wolfe said.

"That's the way it was when I met Harry, but I didn't know it until we were married, two years ago. I admit Getz might not have got killed if it hadn't been for me. When I found out how it was I tried to talk sense into Harry. I told him his name had been connected with Dazzle Dan so long that Getz would have to give him a bigger share, at least half, if he demanded it. He claimed he tried, but he just wasn't man enough. I told him his name was so well known that he could cut loose and start another one on his own, but he wasn't man enough for that either. He's not a man, he's a worm. I didn't let up. I kept after him, I admit that. I'll admit it on the witness stand if I have to. And I admit I didn't know him as well as I thought I did. I didn't know there was any danger of making him desperate enough to commit murder. I didn't know he had it in him. Of course he'll break down, but if he says I knew that he had decided to kill Getz I'll have to deny it because it's not true. I didn't."

Her husband was staring up at

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the back of her head, his mouth hanging open.

"I see." Wolfe's voice was hard and cold. "First you plan to put it on a stranger, Mr. Goodwin—indeed, two strangers, for I am in it too. That failing, you put it on your husband." He shook his head. "No, madam. Your silliest mistake was opening the window to kill the monkey, but there were others. Mr. Cramer?"

Cramer had to take only one step to get her arm.

"Good God!" Koven groaned.

Pat Lowell said to Wolfe in a thin sharp voice, "So this is what you worked me for."

She was a tough baby too, that girl.

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the *NEWEST* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

The various and sundry ways that Mitch Taylor of the Homicide Squad could get himself involved in a case were a riot. This time it was because he'd promoted a free birthday cake for his seven-year-old son Joey, who was nuts about baseball, and why couldn't the cake have a baseball in the center and Joey's name in fancy icing around it? And believe it or not, the bakery supposed to make the birthday cake goes and has its weekly payroll heisted, and the case gets top rating and becomes a real headache to Lieutenant Decker . . .

Another of Lawrence Treat's thoroughly realistic procedural stories, warmly human and completely believable . . .

H AS IN HEIST

by LAWRENCE TREAT

AFTER INSPECTOR MITCH TAYLOR finished his business at the uptown bank—routine stuff, nothing important, just to warn them to look out for this trickster from Chicago—he noticed the uniformed patrolman waiting near a teller's window. Since Mitch didn't know him, he walked over and introduced himself.

The guy's name was Bernie Foster, and for no particular reason he rubbed Mitch the wrong way. The guy was plenty big but on the flabby side, and he had thin eyes and a thin mouth. He towered over Mitch, who was short for a cop and had just squeaked through the minimum regulations. Still, Mitch had a good chest on him and he carried himself as if he knew his business, and nobody could put anything over on him.

They talked for a couple of minutes and Foster said he was being nursemaid to an old geezer who picked up the payroll for the Elite Bakery.

"He's got a regular pattern," Foster said. "Calls for it at eleven o'clock one week, then the next week at quarter after, then half-past, and so on until he gets up to twelve. Then he starts all over again, at eleven."

"Who's going to get fooled by that?" Mitch said.

"He thinks it's great stuff," Foster

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said. "You see, he got held up about a year ago. They tied him up and took two grand and his best pants, and he can't stop yacking about it. That old guy over there. Name's Krakower."

Foster gestured at a sallow, stoop-shouldered man who was shoveling bills and coins into a paper bag. He stood as if he had flat feet, and even his long ridge of nose looked tired out.

Mitch hadn't worked on the case, but he'd seen the reports and remembered that it was still open. Still, he didn't want to discuss it with a mere patrolman. "Must have been easy to grab it from *him*," Mitch remarked vaguely.

Bernie Foster agreed. "Sure, but they won't try it again," he said. "Not with me around."

The old man stepped back from the teller's window, and as he came over, you could tell he didn't cotton to Foster. Chances were, Foster pushed him around and stepped all over him.

Mitch, feeling a little sorry for the old geezer, said conversationally, "You work for the bakery, huh? They sure turn out the bread."

"The bread's all right," Krakower said, "but you ought to see their Special Order Department. They got a new baker, he makes the classy stuff, with the fancy icing. Like sculpture."

"Yeah?" Mitch said. "Then how about him making up a nice cake for my kid's burthday? With his name on, and maybe a baseball in the center. Joey, he's called, and he's nuts about baseball."

"I guess I could fix it up," Krakower said. "How old is the kid?"

"He'll be seven, a week from Sunday."

"I'll tell 'em to have it ready the day before. They'll do it for me, for free."

"Thanks," Mitch said. "Thanks for the favor."

The patrolman, a little annoyed because a high-powered homicide dick had gone out of his way to be friendly to the old man, grunted impatiently. Then Foster unholstered his gun as if he loved to show it off and was aching for a chance to use it.

"Okay, Pop," he said to Krakower. "Let's go."

He took the old man by the elbow and shoved him forward so hard that he almost tripped. Foster turned around and winked at Mitch.

Mitch didn't wink back. There were all kinds, he told himself, and some of them landed in the department. Still, Mitch didn't hire them, or fire them either. He just took things as they came along, and he had nothing to kick about. At least, not today, when he had no worries and could kill the morning talking to a couple of bank managers, and later on call Amy and tell her about that free birthday cake.

He sauntered outside and stood there on the steps of the bank. Fos-

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ter still had his gun out, to tell everybody what hot stuff he was. But the way he walked along, hammering away at the old man and not looking around, someone could step out of a doorway and slug him from behind, and he'd never even know who did it. The kid standing in the entrance to that small supermarket, for instance—

Mitch focused on him. The kid was wearing a red baseball cap and a black sweater, and he seemed a little too interested in Foster and the old man. When the kid glanced at his watch as if he was timing the pair, Mitch kind of rolled his shoulders, ambled down the block, and stopped in front of the kid. The kid was seventeen or so, and he had pale blue eyes and a short broad nose. His ears spread out as if he'd pasted them on and hadn't done it quite right.

"You live around here?" Mitch asked.

The kid knew right off that Mitch was a cop, and it rattled him. He shook his head no for an answer—two quick jerks that almost flipped his ears off.

"What time is it?" Mitch asked.

"Eleven forty-seven," the kid answered promptly.

That clinched it. You ask a kid for the time, and he looks at his watch to make sure, even if he just finished looking at it three seconds ago. And when he tells you, he says quarter of, or ten of, or whatever it is, but he never answers like he was quoting a railroad timetable. So maybe the kid was here to check on when the old man went by with his payroll, and to report on the cop who tagged along with him.

"What's your name?" Mitch said.

"Solly Sanger," the kid answered nervously.

"Where do you live?"

"Millet Street."

"A long ways from home, aren't you?" Mitch remarked. The kid didn't answer, and Mitch said, "Look, Solly, you run along back to where you belong, and you stay there. And any time you got something on your mind, you come down to headquarters and ask for me—Inspector Taylor. And you know what I'm talking about, and I'm telling you this on account I wouldn't want to see you make a mistake. Not a good kid like you."

Solly gawked and fiddled with his cap, and he took off as soon as Mitch's eyes let him go. So that was that. Except Mitch kept thinking how Amy would have liked the Big Brother act he'd used with the Sanger kid.

The thing was, she'd read a book on juvenile delinquency and was all hopped up about it—how crime started and stuff like that. The way she put it, Mitch could stop crime all by himself if he just made friends with all the teen-agers he came across and showed them he was on their side. What he ought to do, she said, was keep them *out* of jail instead of putting them *in*, be-

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cause prison was where they learned all about crime. And she had that much of it right on the button, too.

So he'd done pretty much what she'd have wanted him to, except he was after something different. The way Mitch looked at it, he had to call his shots and pick the kids that he could handle, as against the ones that were made for trouble and wanted it. And this Solly, living on Millet Street, which was a pretty tough neighborhood—Mitch could maybe use him; you never knew when a kid like that might give you a tip. And Mitch's bread and butter were the stoolies and oddballs and police buffs, and occasionally just somebody he'd happened to help out. So Solly Sanger one of these days could turn out to be "money in the bank."

Meanwhile Mitch quit thinking about him, which was more than he could say about Amy's book. She kept on reading it and talking about it. Mitch agreed with everything she said, and more or less waited her out.

It was a pretty good week, with no homicides and with Lieutenant Bill Decker in a good mood. He was on top of most of the robberies and assaults, and he had time to read some of the journals he was always getting, with the result that he let the boys on the Homicide Squad kid him, and he kidded back.

It was the kind of week you ought to have all year round, only you never did. Because, as always, the ceiling fell in.

Not on Mitch personally. He wasn't carrying the case; he was never even on the scene—all he had to do on the first day was to check out a couple of minor matters, and let the Lieutenant do the worrying. Which he was doing plenty of, because this time somebody had killed a cop. Name of Foster.

Mitch got the story second-hand. What had happened was, Foster was escorting Krakower back from the bank, the way he did every Thursday, and the pair of them were walking along the street when some doll stepped out in front of a car and got hit. Naturally enough Foster went over to take charge of the accident, and he got into some kind of argument with the driver, and the driver pulled a gun and shot him.

And while that was happening, somehow or other Krakower got pushed around and somebody took the payroll bag. But whether this somebody just happened along and grabbed the chance, or whether the auto accident and the heist were all planned out as part of the same caper, was anybody's guess.

As usual, everybody on the street saw something different, and the exact details of how Foster got shot—well, you could take your pick and believe whatever you wanted to. There was no good description of the killer, and nobody got a good look at the doll who picked herself

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up and beat it as soon as the excitement started. All you knew was, she was probably more scared than hurt, although a couple of people claimed she went off limping.

Not much to go on. Mitch had kind of an idea in the back of his head, but he wasn't going to sound off with a crackpot theory and no evidence to back it up. There had to be a few facts, first.

Since it was a cop that had been killed, the case got top rating. The uniformed police and plainclothes detectives and the eight-man Homicide Squad all went to work trying to get their teeth into something solid. The car was a Ford sedan, dark color, but whether the license plate number began with L1 or 1L or CL or IL or some other L combination was pretty much of a popularity contest.

The lab had the murder bullet and could match it up with the gun it had been fired from—if they ever got hold of the gun. The citizens who had witnessed the shooting sat down at a table in the Identification Room and examined photographs, and agreed on nothing; and all Krakower had to offer was a sour disposition. If the doll had really been hurt, she hadn't bothered going to a hospital or to any doctor's office they could find.

A whole lot of nothing . . .

The next morning, the way the Lieutenant always did when they had a big one, he called in the Squad and outlined what they'd found out and what they hadn't. It was still mostly hadn't.

"We don't know yet if there's a connection between the accident and the heist," he said. "We do know that the car was traveling about a foot from the line of parked cars and that it sideswiped a red Chevy and dented the fender just before hitting the dame—if the dame was really hit. And we know that Krakower got pushed hard and that the payroll money's gone. The best bet is probably the Motor Vehicle Bureau, where they're listing the names of license holders with plates beginning with all the different combinations that citizens think they saw, and they all agree that there was an L. Chances are the car will turn out to be stolen. Anyhow, we're not working that end today. Somebody has the strange idea that we're smart and can come up with something real bright. Brother, if they only knew!"

After that the Squad threw it around for a while. Ed Balenky, who had investigated Krakower's holdup of a year ago, was sure that one had been genuine.

"I took the guy apart," he said, wrinkling up that brown puss of his until he looked like a coconut. "He wasn't putting anything over on us. Besides, I looked him up a couple of times afterwards, and he didn't buy a new television set or a diamond ring or even a new suit. He's clean."

Mitch held back for a while be-

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fore he let them in on his secret. "When I was at the bank last week I spotted a kid hanging around, acting kind of suspicious. Some kid with a red baseball cap, comes from Millet Street. Think I ought to look him up?"

"Take Balenky with you," Decker said crisply, "and bring the kid back here. I want to see him. We've got to follow up every possible lead."

"Sure," Mitch said. "I'll try and locate him."

After the meeting broke up, Balenky sidled over to Mitch and flashed a smile. His gold tooth looked as if he'd just polished it up. "What gives?" he asked Mitch.

"A kid named Solly Sanger," Mitch said. "We'll look up his address in the directory and then drive down there. He may know something."

There was, however, nobody named Sanger on Millet Street, and Mitch had a sort of sick feeling when he closed the directory.

Balenky took a cigar out of his pocket and stuck the thing in his mouth. He'd chew on it all day long, and around four o'clock he'd light up what was left of it. You'd have to stay away from him then if you didn't want to get asphyxiated, but right now Mitch was safe.

"Think the kid handed you a line?" Balenky asked anxiously.

"Naah," Mitch said. "Not him." The idea was an insult to the entire Homicide Squad. "We'll take a run down there and smoke him out."

Balenky got the idea fast. You drive down there and knock on doors until you find a kid with spread ears and a red baseball cap. If it takes all day, at least you're on your own and you got a car to sit down in whenever you get tired.

Mitch and Balenky, their minds in the same groove, were good at making work easy for themselves, which was why the Lieutenant didn't usually let them team up. And why he'd done it this morning, neither of them knew. Probably thought nothing would come of the lead anyhow.

They parked on Millet, locked the car, and each took one side of the street, asking if anybody knew a kid named Solly Sanger. And sure enough, at the first house Mitch stopped at, they told him Solly lived in Number 43, second floor rear, and his mother was Mrs. Harper and she'd remarried, which was why the name was different.

Mitch came out to the street and got in the car and blew the horn. It brought Balenky running from across the street. He'd stowed away his cigar and he came contentedly, hitching up his belt and chewing on something.

"What gives?" he asked. "There's a dame over there that offered me some coffee cake. I figured if I made friends with her, she could tell me about this kid. Now she's sore be-

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cause I left, and I got to start in all over again."

"I know where the kid is," Mitch said, "and I didn't have to promote anybody's coffee cake to find out. I'm going up to Number Forty-three. You hold down the fort, huh?"

"Sure," Balenky said, grinning. "But what'll I do if I get hungry?"

"Sweat it out," Mitch said. "Didn't they ever tell you about the hardships of police work?"

Balenky made a wry face, which came easy, and Mitch left him and went to Number 43 and rang the bell marked Harper. When a buzzer went off, he opened the door and climbed up the dingy stairs and kept on to the rear apartment.

The woman who was waiting for him said she was Mrs. Harper. She was short and dumpy and looked as if she'd spent most of her life in the kitchen, which was where she took him. When Mitch identified himself and said he wanted to see Solly, she got all flustered up.

"What do you want with him?" she asked. "He's a good boy, he wouldn't do anything wrong, I know it."

"Sure," Mitch said, looking around the kitchen. She was making a pie crust and she'd been rolling it out when the bell rang. On a small table in the corner, Mitch spotted three or four watch cases and a bunch of springs and wheels and doodads. He pointed to them. "Somebody fix watches?" he said.

"Solly does. It's his hobby and he's going to be a watchmaker. That's all he's interested in. People call him the watch boy, everybody knows about him, and strangers come up to him on the street and ask him to repair their watches. You ask him what time it is, and he reels it off to the second. Ten forty-six. Like he was telling you when a railroad train was due."

So Mitch had been wrong about why Solly told time the way he did, but what of it? Nobody bats 1.000, and nobody ever will, and Mitch wasn't disturbed. "Any idea when he'll be back?" Mitch asked.

"What do you want with him?" Mrs. Harper said again.

"Just want to see him," Mitch said. "Where is he? In school?"

"No, he's in the afternoon session."

"Mind if I hang around?" Mitch asked.

"Tell me why," Mrs. Harper said shrilly. *"Tell me!"*

Maybe she was just nervous and maybe Mitch's hunch about Solly was all wet, but how could he be sure? So he shrugged and let the jitters pile up in her while he looked around, particularly at the watches.

After a few seconds he said, "You told me he fixes up old watches. What about that one?" He pointed to a nice shiny pocket watch. "Nothing old about that."

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"Know where he got the money from?" Mitch asked.

She shook her head, and she was more scared than ever.

"When did he buy it?" Mitch asked.

"Last Tuesday. Is that why you're here?"

"Maybe," Mitch said. He told himself that Solly couldn't have bought it with part of the holdup money, not last Tuesday, but the kid was sure as hell mixed up in something.

"Got a phone I can use?" Mitch asked.

"No," she said belligerently. "We can't afford things like that."

Since she couldn't phone Solly or anyone else to warn him, no matter where he was, there was no sense hanging around here. "I guess I'll wait downstairs," Mitch remarked.

Solly showed up a half hour later. His ears were still spread and he was still wearing the black sweater and the red baseball cap, and he was still rattled at being questioned by a cop, and why not?

Mitch signaled him to come over to the car and climb in, and Mitch sat him down between Balenky and himself. Mitch went straight for the Big Brother approach.

"Solly," he said, "like I said the other day, I think you're a good kid and we're not going to do anything to you, so don't hold out on us."

"About what?" Solly said. His Adam's apple was working like a piston.

"Where'd you get the money for that new watch?" Mitch asked. "And what were you hanging around the bank for?"

The way Amy's book said, all Solly really wanted was a father he could tell everything to, and the kid elected Mitch.

"A man paid me to go there every Thursday and watch for a cop and an old man to walk out of the bank, and see how long it took them to get to the supermarket. The man gave me five dollars each time. I got fifteen dollars, and so I bought a watch."

"Who?" Mitch said. "Who was the man?"

Any other cop would have had the guy's name dropped right in his lap, but not Mitch. With him, every time he got a base on balls the next guy up hit into a double play.

"I don't know who he is," Solly said. "I always met him on the street corner."

"Would you know him if you saw him?" Mitch asked.

"Oh, sure."

"You better come along with us," Mitch said, "and look at a few pictures." And, he told himself, the Lieutenant's going to find out exactly where Solly was at the time of the holdup on Thursday morning. It'll turn out he'd been delivering a repaired watch and was a mile away from the bank, and could prove it to the split second.

As Mitch expected, the kid couldn't find the guy's mug in the files,

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but worse than that, Solly got all mixed up. Maybe he was pretty good on watches, but he sure flunked out when it came to faces. He wasn't sure whether the guy who'd paid him off had a nose that was small or large or pug or hooked or straight or flat. Solly got lost on the color and shape of the eyes, and since the guy had been wearing a hat, Solly couldn't tell the color of his hair, or whether he had any.

The result was, the artist who was supposed to draw the composite picture of the killer just doodled around a while and then went home.

At the session in the Squad Room next morning the Lieutenant brought them up to date, like always.

"We know now that the killer paid the Sanger kid to time Foster and Krakower leaving the bank," Decker said. "So the killer must have waited down the block until he saw the pair leave with the payroll. Then he drove towards them and arranged the accident to divert Foster. It took split-second timing. A second man, working on the same time schedule, must have pushed Krakower out of the way and grabbed the dough. Everybody agree on that?"

Bankhart didn't. "How do we know Krakower didn't fake that fall of his and just keep the dough?" the big guy said.

Decker turned to Small. "Tell him, Charlie."

"I spoke to a witness who helped Krakower up," Small said. "A Mrs. Perrini. She said she saw Krakower bleeding at the scalp."

"What about the paper bag with the money?" Bankhart asked.

"The Perrini woman says she didn't see any bag. She says Krakower seemed dizzy, so she told him to go to the hospital. He muttered something about not liking hospitals. Then the shot went off, and she turned away and saw the killer get in his car and drive off. After the shot everybody scattered and ran for cover. I spoke to another witness who saw Krakower right after the shot, and he stumbled around as if he was groggy, but he had nothing in his hands."

"That answer you?" Decker said to Bankhart. Bank nodded, and nobody else had much to say.

"Okay," Decker said. "We're still checking on dark-colored Fords with L plates. For today we drew the 7L batch, and the car we want ought to have a dent with some red paint smears on the right front fender. Here are the lists."

He divided them up, with the Squad working in pairs. They filed out of the Squad Room and stamped down the corridor, kidding around and making a lot of noise. Mitch and Ed Balenky were teamed up again, and Mitch led the way out to the courtyard and climbed into his regular car. Balen-

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ky sat down alongside, stuck a cigar in his mouth, and studied the list that Decker had given him.

"Where to?" Mitch said.

"The first one's all the way out in Short Hills," Balenky said. "A dame named Smith. Want to stop for some coffee on the way?"

"Why not?" Mitch said. "Only first, I better call that bakery and see if they got Joey's cake ready."

He started the car and took it through the archway and out to the street. He swung left and drove a couple of blocks before he sighted a phone booth. He pulled up next to it.

Whoever answered the phone at the bakery didn't know anything about Krakower ordering a cake, and Krakower wasn't there, either, and wouldn't be in for a few days. Because of the holdup and getting an attack of nerves he had taken some time off.

Mitch hung up, left the booth, and got back in the car. "That's funny," he said. "You think Krakower took the cake home with him?"

"May as well go and see," Balenky said. "He lives on Brooke Street —I'll show you the place."

It was a kind of rooming house, a big old-fashioned, wooden building with two decks of porches, and a backyard with some tumble-down garages. Mitch parked in front of the house, rang the janitor's bell, and was sent up to the second floor. He rapped on a paneled door that the varnish was peeling off of, and he heard a stirring inside.

Krakower, rumpled and only half-awake, opened the door. Right off he recognized Mitch as a cop, and damn near passed out.

"What do you want?" the old geezer asked hoarsely.

Mitch, scanning the room, noticed the unmade bed and the chairs that were falling apart, and decided that whatever rent Krakower was paying, it was too much. Which was no skin off Mitch's nose.

"Got my cake?" he asked.

"Oh," Krakower said. "Cake?" He looked relieved, and you could tell he'd forgotten all about it and didn't give a damn. "That cake," he repeated, finally realizing what it was all about. "I never got around to it. Sorry, Mister."

"That's okay," Mitch said. "Don't let it bother you." Then, as if he wanted to make sure there were no hard feelings, he said, "You don't want to get all hot and bothered just because a cop comes around. You'll see plenty more of them later on. They got you down for questioning this afternoon."

"Let 'em come," Krakower said, wheezing.

"Sure," Mitch said. "You got nothing to hide. Just take it easy." And he turned around and left.

Downstairs, he got back in the car and squeezed himself behind the wheel. "Ed," he said, speaking real slow, "that guy's sitting on a

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couple of rotten eggs, and he's liable to move off 'em pretty soon."

"So?" Balenky said, innocently.

"I wish I'd seen that Mrs. Perrini. Think she was big enough to knock him down and take the dough?"

"More likely *he* has it," Balenky said. "I never did like the guy."

"Well, might be smart to park down the street where we can watch for him," Mitch said. "Something might happen, huh?"

"He might walk out with the dough and hand it over to us," Ed Balenky said. "Then the Commissioner would give out with the medals." He grinned broadly. "On the other hand, maybe not. Where's the cake?"

"He never even bothered to ask for it," Mitch said. "All set?"

Balenky nodded, and Mitch took off. In case Krakower was watching to make sure they left, Mitch traveled in a straight line until the rooming house was out of sight. Then, when he figured he was safe, he circled around until he hit a side street from which they could observe the front of the house. He parked there and cut the motor, and he and Balenky waited, which they were good at.

They didn't talk much and they didn't discuss what might happen. Sitting there and doing nothing, and earning dough while they did it—and nobody had a squawk coming, either.

Krakower didn't come out the front—Mitch guessed wrong on that; but after about twenty minutes a dark Ford sedan nosed out of the back yard. It had QQ plates, which meant it was a rental job, and they saw Krakower driving. Immediately, Mitch switched his engine on.

Krakower headed off in the other direction, toward Lincoln, where he turned and went west. Mitch gave him a nice lead, so that Krakower wouldn't spot him, and neither Mitch nor Balenky said anything. They figured they were hot, and talking about it might queer the whole deal. It wasn't every day that you ran into a piece of luck like this, with an easy tail and no worries about losing the guy, because you could always connect up at the rental agency.

That was just about the way it broke, too. They got caught behind a couple of big trucks and lost Krakower for a while, and then they picked him up at the big rental garage. He'd parked in the entrance and had stepped out of the car and was talking to one of the attendants. Mitch swung in and braked the patrol car. Then he and Balenky spilled out, hitched their belts, and walked up to Krakower.

He was holding some papers in his hand, and he stared bugeyed while Mitch strode past and, without a word, bent down to examine the right front fender of the Ford. There was a small dent in it that had recently been painted over. You

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couldn't see if there was any red underneath the new paint, but Jub Freeman at the lab would find out, and Mitch knew which way he'd bet.

He turned around and spoke to Krakower. "That's the car that was in the holdup," he said sharply. "Who shot Foster?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Krakower squeaked.

"Let's see those papers," Mitch said.

Krakower shook his head. "You got no right," he began. But as Balenky grabbed his arm and twisted, he let the papers drop. Mitch picked them up. They were the rental documents and were made out in the name of Thompson, and that just about clinched it.

It was funny how, just because Krakower hadn't kept his promise about the birthday cake, he was now in a jam he couldn't climb out of. All Mitch and Balenky had to do was sit him down in the front seat of the patrol car and pour it on. Inside of a couple of minutes Krakower was spilling everything.

"It began with that holdup a year ago," he said. He turned to Balenky. "You wouldn't believe me, you kept me at headquarters and kept questioning me when I'd had nothing to do with it. But I saw how easy it was to fake a holdup. All I had to do was deny everything, and how could you prove I was lying?"

"Just tell us what happened," Balenky said.

"After that first holdup the company requested police protection for me, and I thought I'd lost my chance. I told Bill Leeds about it. He's a friend of mine, a truck driver, and he said it was still easy. If he knew when I left the bank and exactly how long it took me to walk down the street, he'd manage to have a slight accident, but we'd both have to get to the supermarket at the same time. While the cop went over to investigate, I could hide the bag of money and pretend I'd been robbed."

"So you planned it out with him," Balenky said.

"No, I—all I did was, I said I'd think it over. He wanted me to clock myself from the bank to that supermarket, but I didn't even do that. How could I keep looking at my watch with that cop right next to me all the time? He'd catch on to the whole scheme. So I told Bill to get hold of some kid and let him do the timing. Bill engineered the whole business, you can't even call me an accomplice."

"What about this rental car?" Mitch asked. "Why did you hire it under a false name?"

Krakower stammered. "I'll tell you. I hired it, just in case. I had it parked near the supermarket. I left the trunk compartment open so I could slip the money bag in the trunk and then close it up fast.

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Leeds would get the money later on, that was the idea."

"And that's what you did," Mitch said.

Krakower was gasping, scared nearly breathless, and Mitch had an idea he was leveling.

"No, I didn't take it. The way it happened, everything went wrong. Some dame ran in front of the car, so that it shaped up as a serious accident instead of just a fender dent that didn't have to be reported. At least, Foster must have thought it was serious, because he pushed me so hard that I fell against a grocery cart and dropped the bag, and I never saw the payroll again. Some woman had to help me up, and I was practically out on my feet for a while. Later on, Leeds told me Foster came at him with a drawn gun and acted tough, and Leeds panicked and shot him. But I stayed out of it. It taught me a lesson."

"Look," Mitch said. "You claim you rented a car and parked it near the supermarket, but the car you just returned—that's the one that Leeds drove and had the accident with. How come?"

"Leeds' car is a lemon," Krakower said. "He'd always had trouble with it, and the rental job was the same color and model, so he figured it was a good chance to switch cars. He thought the rental people would never notice the difference."

"Let's get this straight," Mitch said. "You hired a car and parked it near the supermarket. Then Leeds killed Foster. Then what?"

"Soon as I could I brought the car to the garage behind my house and left it there. That's all I did, it was no crime. Bill Leeds shot the cop, and afterwards he brought his car over to my place, painted his fender, and put the QQ plates on. He put his own plates on the rental car and took it home, so when the police examined it yesterday when they were checking L plates, they cleared him. All I did was return this car. I didn't want it anywhere near me, particularly when you said the police were coming to see me this afternoon. What made you follow me?"

The birthday cake, Mitch thought, that's why. But all he said was, "This Bill Leeds—what's his address?"

"3378 Emerson," Krakower answered.

"Okay," Mitch said. "Now let's take a trip down to headquarters, where we can put it all down on paper and you can sign it. You want to report in, Ed?"

Balenky nodded, picked up the phone, got through to the Lieutenant and told him they had the name and address of the guy who'd shot Foster, and that they also had his accomplice and were bringing him in for a statement, and should they pick up this Leeds too?

Decker said no, he'd send a riot-and-siege squad to take care of Leeds. With a cop killer like that,

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Decker wanted to play it safe.

So Mitch and Balenky were out of the big play. After they'd taken Krakower in and booked him on an accessory rap, they went to the joint across the street and had coffee and a couple of those doughnuts Amy said must've been shot out of a cannon. Then they got to talking about the loose ends, like who could have got hold of that payroll. So Mitch remembered Krakower's story—his claiming that he'd fallen against Mrs. Perrini's cart, that she'd helped him up, and that he'd never seen the paper bag bulging with money after that.

Well, if that story was true, it didn't take any egghead to figure out that the dame had just picked up the bag, stuck it in the cart with her groceries, and beat it. And sure enough, when Mitch and Balenky looked up Mrs. Perrini's address and went around and accused her, she admitted it right off; said she hadn't even spent any of the dough—she'd been too scared to.

All in all, it was kind of late when Mitch arrived home. Amy had heard the news on the radio of Leeds's arrest—he hadn't put up any fight at all—but she didn't know Mitch had anything to do with it. All she wanted to know was, did Mitch have Joey's birthday cake? When he said he didn't, she kind of sighed and said, "Oh, Mitchell! How could you forget something like that?"

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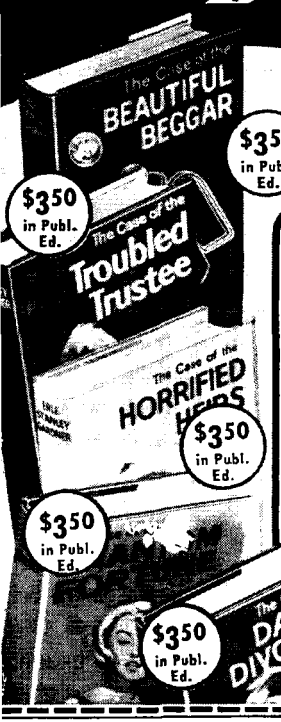
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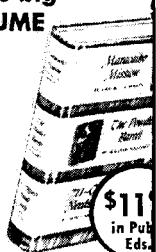

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